Latvijas Universitāte

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE CONCEPT OF *HEBEL* IN THE BOOK OF QOHELET IN RABBINIC SOURCES AND IN THE COMMENTARIES OF CHURCH FATHERS DIDYMUS OF ALEXANDRIA, GREGORY OF NYSSA, AND JEROME

Kohelet grāmatas koncepta *hebel* interpretācijas rabīnistiskajos avotos un Baznīcas Tēvu (Aleksandrijas Didima, Nisas Gregora un Hieronīma komentāros).

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Anotācija

Disertācijas nosaukums ir "Kohelet grāmatas koncepta *hebel* interpretācijas rabīnistiskajos avotos un Baznīcas Tēvu (Aleksandrijas Didima, Nisas Gregora un Hieronīma) komentāros".

Pētījumam ir uzstādīti šādi mērķi: 1) parādīt, ka jūdu un kristiešu agrīnās ekseģētiskās tradīcijas komparatīvai izpētei ir liela nozīme Bībeles kā arī Kohelet grāmatas izpratnē. Rabīnistisko un patristisko komentāru analīze dod mums arī iespēju paplašināt mūsu bibliskā teksta izpratni; 2) izpētīt un analizēt dažādas rabīnistiskas un patristiskas koncepta-*hebel* interpretācijas, demonstrēt līdzības un atšķirības interpretatoru domu gaitā un ekseģētiskajās metodēs, un noskaidrot, vai tiešām Baznīcas Tēvi un Rabīni ir piedāvājuši absolūti atšķirīgas *hebel* (galvenas Kohelet grāmatas tēmas) interpretācijas. Disertācija mēģina pierādīt kā tieši *hebel*-koncepta izpratne mudināja rabīnus un Tēvus reinterpretēt vai parrākstīt Kohelet teksu ar mērķi padarīr grāmatu pieejamāku savai reliģiskai mācībai un tradīcijai. 3) analizējot avotus, mēģināt identificēt potenciālos ekseģētiskos kontaktus starp divām tradīcijām vēlīnajā antīkajā laikā.

Disertācija sastāv no trim nodaļām. Pirmā nodaļa ir veltīta iepriekšējo pētījumu historiogrāfiskam apskatam. Tiek aplūkoti pētījumi vispār par jūdu un kristiešu Bībeles interpretācijām un ekseģētiskiem kontaktiem vēlīnajā antīkajā laikā un arī pētījumi par rabīnistiskajām un patristiskajām Koheleta interpretācijām. Otrā nodaļa velta uzmanību rabīnistiskajām Koheleta interpretācijām, it īpaši Midrāšam Kohelet Rabba, un Baznīcas Tēvu Koheleta komentāriem, kuru darbi tiek pētīti šajā disertācijā. Beidzot darba pēdējā nodaļa tiek veltīta koncepta *hebel* rabīnistisko un patristisko interpretāciju salīdzinošai analīzei.

Secinājumā var teikt, ka koncepta hebel rabīnistisko un patristisko interpretāciju komparatīva analīze parāda, ka, neskatoties uz abu tradīciju atšķirīgām ekseģētiskām metodēm un teoloģiskām prioritātēm un interesēm, koncepta hebel izpratne un interpretācijas kādā ziņā ir līdzīgas. Runājot par tēmām, kas Koheleta grāmatā tiek novērtēti kā hebel rabīnistiskie un patristiskie ekseģēti reinterpretē jeb pārraksta biblisko tekstu ar mērķi mainīt teksta nozīmi un pasargāt to no Koheleta pesimistiskā noskaņojuma, lai padarīt grāmatu pieejamāku savai reliģiskajai tradīcijai. Tātad šī līdzīgā pieeja Koheleta grāmatas izpratnei dod mums iespēju mēģināt runāt par iespējamiem kontaktiem starp jūdu un kristiešu ekseģētiskajām tradīcijām.

Atslēgvārdi: Koheleta grāmata, rabīnistiskā ekseģēze, patristiskā ekseģēze, jūdu-kristiešu ekseģētiskie kontakti

Abstract

The title of the thesis is "The Interpretation of the Concept of *Hebel* in the Book of Qohelet in Rabbinic Sources and in the Commentaries of the Church Fathers Didymus of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, and Jerome".

The research has several aims: 1) to demonstrate that the comparative study of early biblical exegesis in Jewish and Christian traditions plays an important role in understanding the Bible in general and the Book of Qohelet in particular. Therefore analysis of rabbinic and patristic commentaries gives us possibility to improve our understanding of biblical texts; 2) to examine and analyze various rabbinic and patristic interpretations of *hebel* concept, to show similarities or differences in the train of thought and exegetical methods, and to identify do Church Fathers and Rabbis offer fundamentally different interpretations of *hebel* (the main theme of the Book of Qohelet) or we should modify this notion? 3) by analysis of the sources to attempt to identify evidence of potential encounters between the two traditions (Jewish and Christian) in their interpretation of the Scripture in the Late Antiquity.

The research presents the study in comparative exegesis and the history of biblical interpretation. Therefore, it is based on exegetical method which at the same time discovers the specific features of each commentator and also comprehends the essence of the relations between Judaism and Christianity through the biblical exegesis of these two religious traditions.

The thesis consists of three parts. The first chapter is devoted to the historiographic survey of previous studies on Jewish-Christian biblical interpretations and exegetical encounters in Late Antiquity in general, and on the studies on rabbinic and patristic interpretations of Qohelet in particular. Second part will pay attention to rabbinic interpretations of Qohelet, especially to Midrash Qohelet Rabbah and to commentaries on Qohelet of Church Fathers whose works I am using in my study. Finally, the next extensive part of the thesis will deal with comparative analysis of interpretations of *hebel*-concept in the selected sources.

To conclude, I would like to state that the comparative analysis of the interpretation of *hebel*-concept carried out in this thesis has demonstrated the common understanding and similarity in exegetical approaches to the book of Qohelet in rabbinic and patristic exegesis in Late Antiquity. Therefore, the thesis has again emphasized the idea that the comparative study of early biblical exegesis in Jewish and Christian traditions plays an important role in understanding the Bible in general and the Book of Qohelet in particular. In spite of obviously different exegetical methods and interests of both traditions, the understanding of *hebel* and events denoted by it is to some extent similar. While speaking about *hebel*-concept in the book of

Qohelet rabbinic and patristic exegetes turn to the reinterpretation or rewriting in order to change the meaning of the text, to save it from its pessimism and to make the book acceptable for their religious tradition. Thus, having identified these interpretative similarities, we can attempt to assume the existence of potential encounters between Jewish and Christian exegetical tradition.

Keywords: the Book of Qohelet, rabbinic exegesis, patristic exegesis, Jewish-Christina exegetical encounters.

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I INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1. Motivation, methodology, sources

The Book of Qohelet[1] has been for many centuries inspiring people to attempt to interpret its existential content and themes. The vital character of Qohelet's message stimulated the creation of not only classical biblical commentaries on Qohelet, but also of numerous literary works, paintings, musical compositions and films. Qohelet was interpreted by Jewish and Christian sages and theologians in the Late Antiquity, in the Middle Ages, and in early modern period. Qohelet has also influenced the works of many modern writers, poets, scholars, artists, and musicians. Today one can read rabbinic midrashim on Qohelet[2]; various interpretations of Church Fathers[3]; medieval Rabbinic[4] and Karaite[5] commentaries; Krymchak prayer-books;[6] writings of Bonaventure and many other medieval and renaissance Christian writers and poets; Luther's, Melanchthon's and other authors' commentaries of Reformation and post-Reformation

[1] The book of Qohelet is also known as "Ecclesiastes" according to Greek translation of the book (Septuaginta). In this thesis both variants will be used depending on their use in the sources.

[2] The extensive interpretation of Qohelet is found in Midrash Qohelet Rabbah. We shall analyze this source in our thesis. Less known and fragmentary rabbinic commentary is Qohelet Zuta. According to some studies, Aramaic translation of the book of Qohelet (Targum Qoehelet) also has some aspects of commentary. There is also fragmentary interpretation of some passages of Qohelet in other midrasim (for example Leviticus Rabbah and Genesis Rabbah) and in the Babylonian Talmud.

[3] The following sources are among early Christian interpretations of the book of Qohelet: *Commentary on the Beginning of Ecclesiastes* of Dionysius of Alexandria (*ca*. 200–*ca*. 265), a student of Origen; Origen's own commentary on Qohelet is not longer extant. It is possible to reveal Origen's interpretations only from the commentaries of his followers. Gregory Thaumaturgos's *Paraphrase* (*ca*. 245) is the earliest systematic Christian treatment of Ecclesiastes which has come down to us. Like Thaumaturgos's work, the commentary of Didymus of Alexandria is complete (bar the last verses of ch. 12) and systematic. Gregory of Nyssa's eight homilies on Qohelet 1–3:13 (*ca*. 380) were addressed to an ecclesial congregation. Lesser known is a commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia (*ca*. 350–428). The *scholion* of Evagrius Pontikus also contains interpretation of Qohelet. In comparison to the writings mentioned above, Jerome's commentary (388/9) is more complete and classic interpretation. Olympiodorus, deacon in Alexandria, composed commentary on Qohelet (ca. 510), integrating in it diverse exegetical approaches. The new form of patristic exegesis belongs to *Catena on Ecclesiastes* of Procopius of Gaza (d. ca. 538). In his catena Procopius quoted almost all the abovementioned patristic commentaries. For information about critical editions of those sources, see Bibliography of this thesis.

[4] The most known medieval Rabbanite commentaries on Qohelet belong to Rashi (1040–1105) and Ibn Ezra (1092/3–1167). Saadia Gaon in his *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions* also offers some fragmentary interpretations on Qohelet. The commentary of French exegete and Talmud scholar Rashbam (*ca*. 1080–*ca*. 1160) is a lucid and coherent treatment. The principle applied with "absolute consistency" throughout his commentary is to arrive at a literal meaning. "A word, a phrase, a verse – when found in a given context – can have one and only one interpretation." Another outstanding Jewish work of this period was composed by Samuel ibn Tibbon (sometime between 1198/9 and 1221) and was one of the first major works of philosophical exegesis written in Hebrew.

[5] There are two medieval Judaeo–Arabic commentaries on Qohelet written by Karaite scholars: the commentaries of Yephet ben 'Ali (written *ca*. 990) and Salmon ben Yeruhim. The comparative analysis of these commentaries was undertaken by George Vajda (George Vajda, *Deux commentaries karaïtes sur l'Ecclésiaste* (Leiden: Brill, 1971)). Furthermore, a fifteenth-century Karaite author from Constantinople, Moses Metsorodi, composed a large five-volume commentary on Qohelet (see Moshe Metsorodi, *Pi Moshe: perush sefer Qohelet*, ed. Yosef Algamil, 5 vols (Ramla, 2000)).

[6] The Krymchaks were the Crimean community of the Turkic-speaking Rabbanite Jews. They entitled one of their prayer-books with the quotation from Qohelet 6:9 (see *Tov Mareh 'Einaim*, ed. Shlomo Ashkenazi, Yehudah Ashkenazi, Rafael Lobok, 2 vols. (Kraków, 1905)).

period. Qohelet's poetic language and philosophic content influenced also the world literature and poetry. To give you a few examples, one can recall medieval English poets, Dante poetry, and the nineteenth and twentieth-century writers (Thomas Hardy, P. Shelley, Thackeray, T. S. Eliot, E. Hemingway, L. Untermeyer, R. Bradbury, A. Averchenko[7] etc.). Qohelet's influence upon arts and music is less impressive, but is still noticeable. Salvador Dali offers the most fantastic rendering, a kind of cosmic Qohelet in his illuminated Bible – royal, all-encompassing and universal. Qohelet's *vanitas* theme became a reflective interest to choral and string music of the first half of the seventeenth century. Some classical composers (J. Brahms, Granville Bantock) also have been attracted by Qohelet's philosophical message and reflected their impressions in music. Qohelet seems to have made little impact on popular music. Yet, Byrds's famous hit *Turn! Turn! Turn!* and some albums by U2 also were influenced by Qohelet's imagery. Qohelet has never been "filmed," but its influence on the titles and ideas of some films is likewise recognizable. There exist a number of popular comparative interpretations. Such studies include comparisons of Qohelet to Beckett, Camus, various Egyptian sources, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Flaubert, Goethe, Hemingway, the *I Ching* (ancient Chinese *Book of Changes*), Omar Khayyam, Montaigne, Nabokov, Tolkien,[8] Pascal, and Shakespeare.[9]

I shall limit my study to the analysis of several most essential and important Jewish and Christian interpretations on Qohelet which were composed in Late Antiquity. The attention shall be paid to rabbinic and patristic commentaries on Qohelet. Special attention will be given to the analysis of the most important rabbinic source – Midrash Qohelet Rabbah. Nevertheless, other rabbinic works, which contain comments on Qohelet, also shall be analysed. From the works by Church Fathers I have decided to analyze the commentaries by Didymus of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, and Jerome. The works mentioned above represent various types and genres of patristic exegesis. Moreover, I will examine the interpretations of one particular theme of Qohelet, namely, the understanding of *hebel*-concept. *Hebel* occurs in Qohelet more than thirty times. This frequent occurrence is a convincing proof of the significance of this word and events which it denotes in the book. This is why the analysis of the *hebel*-concept is highly important for better understanding the Book of Qohelet. By comparison of rabbinic and patristic

[7] See his novel "New Solomon" which starts with the quotation from Ecclesiastes (A. Averchenko, "Novyi Solomon," in his *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Respublika, 1999), 383-389).

[8] One of unpublished Bilbo's songs contained a slightly modified quote from Qohelet (J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil* (London: Unwin, 1990), [p.5]).

[9] More detailed information about various studies on Qohelet is found in E.S. Christianson, *Ecclesiastes through the Centuries* (Blackwell Publishing, 2007); Sveden Holm-Nielsen, "The Book of Ecclesisastes and the Interpretation of It in Jewish and Christian Theology," *Annual of Swedish Theological Institute* 10 (1976): 40-96.

interpretations of *hebel*-related concepts and events I would like to demonstrate the fact that the comparative study of early biblical exegesis in Jewish and Christian traditions plays an important role in understanding the Bible in general and the Book of Qohelet in particular. Consciousness and activity of Rabbis and Fathers were rooted in common and shared biblical culture. Therefore analysis of rabbinic and patristic commentaries give us possibility to improve our understanding of biblical texts.

The aim of my research is to show the wide spectrum of possible interpretation of the Book of Qohelet pertaining to Christian and rabbinic traditions. My research is largely an attempt to answer the question: "Do Church Fathers and rabbis offer fundamentally different interpretations of *hebel* (which is the main theme of the Book of Qohelet) or we should modify this notion?"

The thesis of my dissertation shall prove that it was the brooding over the *hebel*-concept that induced both Rabbis and Church Fathers to reinterpret or to rewrite Qohelet's text in order to make the book acceptable for their respective religious teaching and tradition. The analysis of the sources shall show that Rabbis reinterpret Qohelet's text on the basis of the ethical teaching of the Torah but Fathers rewrite and spiritualize the text in the light of Gospel teaching.

The comparative analysis of the abovementioned sources shall also examine the relationship between rabbinic and patristic biblical commentators. Furthermore, in my study I shall attempt to identify and analyze evidence of potential encounters between the two traditions (Jewish and Christian) in their interpretation of the Scripture in the Late Antiquity. Therefore this study is highly significant for our understanding of the early stages of Jewish-Christian dialogue. However it is important to be objective in our attempts to determine whether this Judeo-Christian exegetical encounter indeed took place or not. Furthermore, one should take into account the problematic dating of rabbinic sources. The time of composition of our patristic sources does not correspond with the time of the last redaction[10] of Midrash Qohelet Rabbah. Consequently, even if one finds similarities in patristic and rabbinic interpretations of Qohelet, one must always take into account the dating and the origin of each particular rabbinic or patristic source. Accordingly, all relevant sources will be analyzed in their own specific historical and literary context. To conclude, the main task of my research is to examine and analyze various rabbinic and patristic interpretations of *hebel* concept and to show similarities or differences in the train of thought and

[10] Like other midrashim, Midrash Qohelet Rabbah is a result of the long chain of various redactions. It does not possess a precise date of creation, but presents an anthology that had been for a long time compiled and redacted. For more details, see the chapters devoted to rabbinic literature and Midrash Qohelet Rabba.

exegetical methods. The research will be presented as a detailed study in comparative exegesis and the history of biblical interpretation. It is also important to mention that none of previous studies on Jewish and Christian exegesis analyzed this topic. Therefore, this thesis is an absolutely novel and important contribution to scholarship.

Since we deal with biblical interpretations, this research will be based on exegetical method. Moreover, as this has been shown by previous students of the problem, the study of exegesis is highly important for further study of Jewish-Christian relations in Late Antiquity.[11] Therefore, this method combines the two tasks of the research: 1) to undertake exegetical analysis of patristic and rabbinic interpretations of Qohelet and discover the specific features of each commentator; 2) to comprehend the essence of the relations between Judaism and Christianity through the biblical exegesis of these two religious traditions. It is also possible to say that study of the exegetical encounters not only casts a light on Jewish-Christian relations in Late Antiquity, but also helps to improve and develop these relations today.

A few words should be said about my sources. Qohelet Rabbah is a self-evident choice, as it is a classical collection of midrashim on the Book of Qohelet. A few other sources which comment on Qohelet will also be taken into account: Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds, Targum Qohelet, and other midrashim. Midrash Qohelet Rabbah was translated into English,[12] German, and Yiddish;[13] during my analysis I will use these translations as well.

In order to present patristic interpretations I have chosen three Church Fathers' commentaries, namely, commentaries by Didymus of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa and Jerome. All afore mentioned Church Fathers lived in different geographic areas. Furthermore, their commentaries on Qohelet represent various exegetical methods and genres. Although there are some borrowings and similarities in their commentaries, each work has it own individual features and approaches to Qohelet. Didymus came from the Alexandrian tradition of exegesis, and his commentary on Qohelet is preserved in the form of school lectures written in Greek. The critical edition of the papyri of Didymus' commentary, which was found in 1941, will be used by me together with their German translation. Gregory of Nyssa represented Cappadocian tradition and wrote his work on Qohelet in the form of homilies. I shall use available Greek texts of his work

[11] Exegetical approach was used by many scholars who undertook comparative study of patristic and rabbinic interpretations of some biblical books, verses, and themes. This approach was first mentioned by R. Loewe and then was widely applied in study of interpretation of the books of Genesis, Exodus, of some biblical characters such as Seth, Enosh, Noah, Abraham, Melchizedek, Jethro, Balaam, and Job.

[12] *Midrash Rabbah. Ecclesiastes,* transl. A. Cohen (London: Soncino Press, 1957).

[13] *Midrash Rabbah: Koheleth (Ecclesiastes),* transl. and ed. Shimshon Dunsky (Montreal, Quebec: Northern printing, 1967).

and its critical English translation. Jerome was a representative of the Western (Latin) tradition who not only wrote classical commentary on Qohelet, but also compiled various interpretations of Qohelet composed by his predecessors. I will use the original Latin text of his commentary and also the Russian translation.

I have mentioned the problem of the chronology and dating of my sources. There is no doubt that the patristic sources come from the fourth century A.D. However, chronological parameters remain a problem in case of rabbinic documents. The last redaction of Midrash Qohelet Rabbah is dated approximately to the eighth century A.D. It is important to take into account the fact that Qohelet Rabbah is actually an anthology which was compiled by its redactor from earlier rabbinic sources. This fact allows us to undertake the comparative analysis between patristic and rabbinic sources.

Before starting a comparative study of the sources I shall examine the general questions and themes related to the history of Jewish-Christian relations and exegesis. The structure of my thesis looks as follows. The first chapter is devoted to the historiographic survey of previous studies on Jewish-Christian biblical interpretations and exegetical encounters in Late Antiquity in general, and on the studies on rabbinic and patristic interpretations of Qohelet in particular. Second part pays attention to rabbinic interpretations of Qohelet, especially to Midrash Qohelet Rabbah and to commentaries on Qohelet of Church Fathers whose works I am using in my study. Finally, the next extensive part of the thesis deals with the comparative analysis of the interpretations of *hebel*-concept in the selected sources. All the occurrences of *hebel* in Qohelet will be divided thematically.[14] This will help to group rabbinic and patristic interpretations and to facilitate the comparative analysis. This division is based on previous exegetical studies of *hebel* in the Book of Qohelet.

1.2. The Book of Qohelet and keyword *hebel*

Since the starting material of our rabbinic and patristic commentaries was the biblical text of the Book of Qohelet, it is worthwhile saying in this introductory chapter some words about this book and the place and meaning of *hebel* in it. Hebrew word (*kohelet*) occurs in the

[14] *Hebel* in the book of Qohelet is used as a judgment or an evaluation of some things, events, situations. Having taken into account this fact some scholars in their commentaries on Qohelet analyzed all the occurrences of *hebel* and defined some themes of its use. We can distinguish following themes: 1) human activity and effort; 2) wealth; 3) pleasure; 4) human speech; 5) wisdom; 6) living being and human being; 7) death; 8) justice and activity of God; and 9) thematic expression – all is *hebel* (1:2, 12:8). For thematic interpretation of use of hebel on Qohelet see E. M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1981); M. Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989); B. L. Berger, "Qohelet and the Exigencies of the Absurd," *Biblical Interpretation* 9, 2 (2001): 141-179.

book seven times – and nowhere else in the Old Testament. Qohelet is a participle constructed from the verb *khl* – to assemble, to gather, to meet. It was supposed that *Qohelet* in spite of its feminine gender denotes a profession, analogically to another examples in the Old Testament, *soperet* – writer (Ezr 2:55, Ne 7:57), *pokereth-hazzebaim* – huntress of the gazelles (Ez 2:57; Neh 7:59). So it may be that *Qohelet* identify somebody who turns to the community, assembly. Author used this word both as a proper noun and a metonymy of the profession.[15] In Septuagint *Kohelet* is translated as εκκλησιαστής – a member of a community. Jerome translates this word in Latin as *contianator* that means "speaker in the assembly of people".[16]

Because of first verse of the Book "The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem" and other passages (1:12; 1:16; 2:4-11) it was assumed that the author of the book is the king Solomon. However the language,[17] style, content, social and political[18] references contradict to this assumption. In addition, if the author really wanted to disguise his composition as Solomon's work, instead of using the name of *Qohelet*, he could simply mention at least once the name of Solomon (this was customary in pseudoepigraphic literature).[19] The negation of Solomon's authorship, however, shows that the question about the author of the book remains open. Seemingly Qohelet did not intend to stress a historicity of his figure, but rather his experience, to describe his psychological portrait. One can try to define the author only from the body of the Book's text. This information does not speak about historical figure, but reveals a world view and a teaching of the author. [20]

The lexica, style, and theology of the book also does not allow to date it to Solomon's time and a period before the exile. The scholars who observe an influence of Greek philosophy[21] on Qohelet (*Graetz, Plumptre, Siegfried, Levy, Wildeboer, Allgeier, Pfleiderl, Ranston, Palm, Haupt, Herrtzberg*) date the book *terminus a quo* (later than 322 BC). At the same time other scholars (*Delitzsch, Renan, Menzel, Nowack, McNeile, Zapletal, Barton)* criticize a hypothesis

[15] S.R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), 466; R. K. Harison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 1072-1073; O. Kaiser, *An Introduction to the Old Testament. A Presention of its Results and Problems* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), 396.
[16] O. Kaiser, *Introduction.*
[17] The language overfilled with arameisms testifies to the period later than the innings of Solomon. Delitzsch, for example, has argued that if the author of Qohelet was Solomon – than the history of the Hebrew language was not possible (as cited in R.K. Harison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1075).
[18] E.g. Qoh 3:16; 4:1; 5:8; 8:9; 10:5s; 10:7; 10:20.
[19] R. Gordis, *Koheleth – The Man and His World: A Study on Ecclesiastes*, 3rd ed. (New York: Schocken, 1968), 40.
[20] For details, see ibid., 75-86, 122-133.
[21] It is stoicism, epicurism, kinism, aristotelism and early Greek popular philosophy. For details, see H. Ranston, *Ecclesiastes and the Early Greek Wisdom Literature* (London, 1925); R. Braun, *Kohelet und die Fruhhellenistische Popularphilosophie* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1973); M. Hengel, *Palestinian Judaism and Hellenism* (John Bowden, 1973).

about the influence of Greek philosophy because in the lexica, style, and ideas one can hardly notice any traces of the Greek language and philosophy. Most of those scholars share an opinion that Qohelet expresses an original development of Jewish thought that was utterly Semitic in its position and independent from Greek influence.[22] The presence of some Old Persian words *pardes* – a garden (2:5), *pitgam* – a decree (8:11) allows us to date the book to the Persian time (6^{th} – 4^{th} cent. BC). [23] The analysis of the fragments of the book found in Qumran refers to the third century BC.[24] It seems very likely that the Book of Qohelet was written before Maccabeus. This is attested by the fact that it was known to Sirach who wrote his work about 180 BC.[25] Therefore, on the basis of these facts one can conclude that the most probable time of the origin of Qohelet is the third century BC. Scholars who suppose the influence of Greek philosophy suggest that the author of the book has lived in Alexandria. However the text itself (1:1; 1:12, 16) proves that the book was written in Palestine (Jerusalem).

The language of the book allows us to date it to the late period of the development of the Hebrew language. It is possible that this Hebrew is a kind of transitional Hebrew, from biblical Hebrew to the language of Mishnah.[26] Qohelet was the first biblical book whose vocabulary, phonetics, and morphology were so strongly influenced by Aramaic.[27]

The style of the book is very multiform, and scholars still did not come to an agreement the book should be considered poetic or prosaic work. Usually scholars identify the following genres which may be found in the book: autobiographic narrative (1:12; 2:1-11), rhetorical questions (1:3), parables and aphorisms (7:1-8; 10:1-3, 8-15), sermon and didactic narratives (4:13-16; 5:13-17; 7:13-29; 9:1-16).[28] Generally speaking, the Book of Qohelet is primarily a monologue which expresses reflections and preachments with elements of dialogue.[29]

Like many others books of the Bible, Qohelet also has its main themes and keywords[30]. Undoubtedly *hebel* which occurs in the book more than 38 times is the keyword[31] which

[22]C. F. Whitley, *Kohelet* (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1979), 158-161; R.K. Harison, *Introduction*, 1076-1077.
[23] O. Kaiser, *Introduction*, 401.
[24] Ibid.,401; B. Child, *Introduction*, 582.
[25] *The Interpriter's Bible*, vol.5 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 14; R.K. Harison, *Introduction*, 1077.
[26] *The Interpriter's Bible*,vol.5. 12; R. Gordis, *Koheleth*, 56; S.R. Driver, *Introduction*, 473-475.
[27] E.g. certain Aramaisms that are found in the book of Qohelet: *yitron* "benefit, gain"; *kebar* "yet", *hešbon* "account, advantage", *pešer* "comprehension", *hesron* "defect", *gummas* "pit", *inyan* "thing, work" etc. For details, see S.R. Driver, *Introduction*, 474-475.
[28] *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 270; *Expozitor's Bible commentary*, ed. Frank Gabelein (Michigan: Zondervann, 1984), 1147.
[29] E. M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1981), 32-33.
[30] Usually poems contain certain words that are repeated and are keywords because of their sound, position in the poem and function of the meaning. Generally one distinguishes three types of the keyword: 1) dominating word: 2) recurring

expresses one of the main ideas of Qohelet. Introductory and concluding verses (1:2; 12:8) *habel habelim 'amar kohelet habel habelim hakol habel* is a motto that summarizes Qohelet's message and puts it in a poetic frame. *Hebel* is used to judge the experience of the author's life as a whole, and it is Qohelet's experience which defines *hebel* for readers. Qohelet observes the following to be *hebel* in relation to his experience: all that he observes (1:14); the test that he made of wisdom and folly (2:1); all the deeds he has done (2:11, 17); his fate in comparison to the fool (2:14–15); the fate of his inheritance (2:18–19, 21; cf. 2:26; 4:7–8); the days of his life (7:15); and everything (1:2; 3:19; 9:1; 12:8). *Hebel*, especially as a motto, guides the reader towards a proper interpretation of Qohelet's words. *Hebel* controls the way of our reading, determines our evaluation of the book. It is more than just a keyword. We can try to argue that understanding of the book is depended on understanding of *hebel.* The potential range of meaning is phenomenal, partly because *hebel* is used in different contexts and defines different things and events. Semantic feature of the Hebrew word allows us to offer more than one metaphoric meaning. For example, modern scholars argue that it is problematic to translate *hebel* and find its precise equivalent in modern languages. In order to resolve this problem translators and commentators offer following meanings: breath, vapour, vanity, futility, emptiness, meaningless, useless, ephemerality, illusory, ironic, temporary, incomprehensible, valueless, nothing, enigma, absurd (absurdity), something that is beyond mortal grasp etc. Each of these translations expresses the meanings of *hebel* in various contexts of its use in Qohelet. Some scholars argue that interpretation of *hebel* will be easy if one understands it as a symbol and a metaphor.[32] As will be shown in this research, early commentators of Qohelet also understood a special function of *hebel*. They paid attention to its various meanings and saw in it the main idea of the book. There

word: and 3) thematic word. One of the main functions of the keyword is to express the main theme of the poem. See also W. G. E. Watson, "Classical Hebrew Poetry. A Guide to its Techniques," *Journal for Study of the Old Testament. Supplement Series 26* (1984): 287-288.

[31] Modern researchers (Gordis, Staples, Good, Ogden, Scott, Fox, Seow, Miller) of the book of Qohelet mainly agree that *hebel* is the key and the way for understanding the sense of the book. However, there is opinion that *hebel* does not express the main theme of the book because Qohelet touches upon different subjects, and there are many passages where *hebel* is not used at all (R. B. Scott, *Proverbs. Ecclesiastes* (New York: Garden City, 1965), 209).

[32] For recent studies on the use and the meaning of *hebel* in Qohelet, see: G.S. Ogden, *Qohelet. Readings: A new Biblical Commentary* (Sheffeld: JOST, 1987); R. B. Scott, *Proverbs*; C.L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, in *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 18C (New York: Doubleday, 1997); E. M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*; M. Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*; D.C. Fredericks, *Coping with Transience: Ecclesiastes on Brevity of Life* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993); B. L. Berger, "Qohelet and the Exigencies of the Absurd"; M. Fox, "The Meaning of *Hebel* for Qohelet," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105, 3 (1986): 409-427; D. B. Miller, "Qohelet's Symbolic Use of ," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117, 3 (1998): 437-454; C. L. Seow, "Theology When Everything Is Out Of Control," *Interpretation. Journal of Bible and Theology* 55, 3 (2001): 230-249; John E. McKenna, "The Concept of *Hebel* in the Book of Ecclesiastes," *SJT* 45 (1992): 19-28; Eunny P. Lee, *The Vitality of Enjoyment in Qohelet's Theological Rhetoric* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005); Daug Ingram, *Ambiguity in Ecclesiastes* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2006).

is no doubt that because of belonging to their respective religious traditions both Jewish and Christian interpreters understood the concept of *hebel* and its use in Qohelet according to their religious teaching. Using interpretation and understanding of *hebel* in our rabbinic and patristic sources as an example, I will show how religious context and tradition had influenced biblical interpretation in the ancient intellectual world.

1.3. Literature survey

In this chapter I would like to turn to earlier studies that to certain extent paid attention to the comparison of rabbinic and patristic exegetical literature and Jewish–Christian encounters in general, and to comparative analysis of our sources in particular. I shall analyse earlier studies chronologically, thus representing a historiography of the subject. I shall also examine studies which compared Gregory's of Nyssa, Didymus' of Alexandria and Jerome's commentaries on Ecclesiastes with rabbinic interpretations.

Comparative study of rabbinic and patristic literature emerged as a separate scholarly field relatively recently, i.e. in the middle of the nineteenth century. This fact is directly connected with emergence of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. For a few decades this scholarly field was represented mainly by Jewish scholars with classical education. They used their knowledge of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin in order to study the literature of Rabbis and Church Fathers. Early studies had a tendency to emphasize strong influence of rabbinic tradition on patristic exegesis. Representatives of such studies cast a light on the development of aggadic literature and also on social, political and religious situation of the Jews in late antiquity. Attempts to restore the lost rabbinic traditions with the materials found in the writings of Church Fathers were important feature of these early studies. Some scholars even argued that one can understand many Talmudic and midrashic fragments only in the light of exegesis and polemic of Christian theologians.[33]

Such studies were pioneered by the historian Heinrich Graetz. In 1854/5 he published a highly important article about aggadic elements in the writings of Church Fathers and demonstrated that Jewish parallels can be found in the works of Justin, Origen, Jerome, and Efrem. Graetz also insisted that comparative studies of this type are highly important for better

[33] For more detailed analysis of early studies, see Judith R. Baskin, "Rabbinic-Patristic Exegetical Contacts in the Late Antiquity: A Bibliographical Reappraisal," in Approaches to Ancient Judaism. Studies in Judaism and its Greco-Roman Context (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 5: 54; Adam Kamesar, "Church Fathers and Rabbinic Midrash," in *Encyclopedia of Midrash. Biblical Interpretation in Formative Judaism*, ed. J. Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 1: 21; G. Stemberg, "Exegetical Contacts between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of its Interpretation*, ed. I.M. Saebo (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 570.

understanding of many aspects of Jewish history and also for dating aggadic literature. In the period between 1863 and 1900 a number of articles, books and dissertations followed Graetz's example. D. Gerson studied a connection between Efrem's commentaries and Jewish exegesis; Rahmer devoted his studies to the problem of influence of Jewish traditions on Jerome and Pseudo–Jerome; Siegfried also studied Jerome, while A.H. Goldfahn analyzed Justine.[34] The results of the first period of such comparative studies were summarized by S. Krauss in his article in the Jewish Quarterly Review (1893, 1984) and in Jewish Encyclopedia (1906).[35] The studies of rabbinic parallels in patristic texts reached their culmination in the works of Louis Ginzberg during 1899 and 1935. His studies provided a broader picture of both religions, that is Judaism and Christianity. Ginzberg is a highly authoritative scholar in the area of studies of the rabbinic–patristic encounter. His study *Legends of the Jews* is an important point in the early stage of studies devoted to the analysis of the rabbinic–patristic encounter In spite of this, Ginzberg's conclusions relating to rabbinic–patristic parallels usually depended on previous studies; furthermore, one may find an appaling lack of historical critique and chronological facts in his publications. [36]

Because of their uncritical and subjective methodology compilations of rabbinic–patristic parallels mentioned above became an object of critique in many later studies. Unfortunately, while trying to demonstrate the link between, e.g. patristic exegetical texts of the 4th century and rabbinic tradition dated to the 9th and 10th centuries, early scholars often used absolutely ahistorical and inconsistent methodology. Early scholars also rarely took into account other non-rabbinic Jewish texts, Judeo–Hellenistic sources, pseudoepigraphs, and Targums. The critics argued that, in order to demonstrate parallels between two texts, one should prove not only the identical conclusions of both traditions, but also to show that one tradition could possibly influence the other or, on the contrary, borrow something from it. [37] When speaking about exegetical encounters between the Jews and Christians the critics also suggested that the Jews as represented in the works of Church Fathers had not been real representatives of living Judaism. In their opinion, patristic commentaries that cite Jewish authors do not testify to the contacts between both traditions. A. von Harnack in his study on *Adversus Iudaeos*, came to the

[34] For more details, see J. R. Baskin, "Rabbinic-Patristic Exegetical Contacts," 54; Burton L. Visotzky, *Fathers of the World. Essays in Rabbinic and Patristic Literature* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1995), 24.
[35] S. Krauss, "The Jews in the Works of the Church Fathers," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 5 (1892): 122-157; ibid., *Jewish Quarterly Review* 6 (1893): 225-261.
[36] E.g. Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 6 vols (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1909-1928).
[37] For the critique, see J. Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism. The Christian-Jewish Argument in Fourth-Century Iran* (Leiden, 1971), 154.

conclusion that starting from the second-century Christians were no more interested in "real" Jews, and there were no more serious contacts between Judaism and Christianity after that. Adversaries–Jews did not exist in a reality, but only in the imagination of Christians. A. von Harnack even tried to prove that polemic book *Adversus Iudaeos* was the result of Christians' encounter with pagans – largely because Christians tried to present the Jews as pagans. One can not also be sure that the rabbinic expression *minim* (Heb. "sectarians") was related to Christians and not to other religious groups.[38]

All earlier students of the problem paid attention to the verification of parallels in patristic and rabbinic texts. Changes in direction of comparative studies happened after the Second World War. To give an example, the studies by J. Isaak *Jesus et Israel* (1948) and M. Simon *Versus Israel* (1948) influenced this change of accents. The question of midrashic methods in patristic texts was studied in broad historical context of Jewish–Christian relations.[39] M. Simon, for example, contrasted rabbinic and patristic methods of biblical interpretation. He arrived to the conclusion that in spite of mutual influence of one tradition on another, result of the contacts was expressed in conscious disagreement.[40]

Historical aspect of Jewish-Christian encounter had also continued to be studied. Y. Baer in his book *Israel, the Christian Church, and the Roman Empire from Time of Septimus Severus to the Edict of Toleration of 313* tried to discover traits of politic and religious struggle of Israel through connection of patristic literature with Talmudic and midrashic tradition.[41] R. Leowe, in his turn, understood the study of Jewish and Christian exegesis as method to study of Jewish–Christian relations in Late Antiquity.[42]

In the years that followed scholars continued to attempt to work out a unified methodology and to define criteria for historical research of exegetical traditions. Non-rabbinic Jewish sources also were included in those studies. The similarity of Jewish and Christian sources, which has been established earlier as a borrowing from each other or common tradition,

[38] For more details, see E. Kessler, *Bound by Bible: Jews, Christians and Sacrifice of Isaac* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), 11-14.
[39] Adam Kamesar, *Church Fathers and Rabbinic Midrash*, 22.
[40] M. Simon, *Verus Israel. A Study of the Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (135-425)*, trans. H. McKeating (Oxford: OUP, 1986).
[41] For more details, see J. R. Baskin, "Rabbinic-Patristic Exegetical Contacts," 60.
[42] R. Loewe, "The Jewish Midrashim and Patristic and Scholastic Exegesis of the Bible," in *Studia Patristica*, ed. Kurt Aland (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1957), 1: 492, 495.

was now called in question; scholars began thinking that interpreters of one and the same text could come to similar conclusion independently, i.e. without borrowing from each other.[43]

Quite a few studies devoted to the analysis of the influence of Jewish tradition on individual Church Fathers were published in the 1970s-1980s. It is worthwhile mentioning the following publications: N. de Lange *Origen and Jews* (1976); H. Bietenhard *Caesarea, Origenes und die Juden* (1974); D. Halperin *Origen, Ezekiel's Merkabah and the Ascension of Moses* (1981); J. Braverman *Jerome's Commentary on Daniel: A Study of Comparative Jewish and Christian Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible* (1978); R. Wilken *A Study of Cyril of Alexandria's Exegesis and Theology* (1971); J. Neusner *Aphrahat and Judaism. The Christian–Jewish Argument in Fourth-Century* (1971).[44] Authors of these works made their aim to study Jewish–Christian dialogue and compare Christian and Jewish interpretations of biblical books or separate biblical themes. The studies by J. R. Baskin and S. Fraade seem to be among most impressive publications in this fiels.[45] These two scholars did not search for parallels and borrowing in rabbinic and patristic sources, but analyzed and evaluated various exegetical methods of both traditions. Abovementioned studies emphasized differences in interpretations of biblical text, the differences that at the same time represented different beliefs and goals of each religious community.[46]

Publication of articles by many important Jewish and Christian scholars was undertaken in the middle of the 1980s in *Early Biblical Interpretations* (edited by J.L. Kugel, and R.A. Greer). The value of this collection of articles is somewhat undermined by too apologetical character of most of them.[47] M.J. Mulder has later published a compendium devoted to the exegetical tradition of Judaism and Christianity. Among twelve articles published there one should mention R. Kasher's article about rabbinic literature and W. Horbury's article on the exegesis of Church Fathers.[48] Horbury suggests that the presence of rabbinic interpretations in

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[43] E.g. Geza Vermes's work (Geza Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism. Haggadic Studies,* in *Studia Post-Biblica 4* (Leiden, 1973).

[44] For more details about these studies, see Judith R. Baskin, "Rabbinic-Patristic Exegetical Contacts," 61-68.

[45] J. R. Baskin, *Pharaoh's Counsellor. Job, Jethro and Balaam in Rabbinic and Patristic Tradition,* in *Brown Judaic Studies* 47 (Chico, 1983); S. D. Fraade, *Enosh and His Generation. Pre-Israelite Hero and History in Postbiblical Interpretation*, in *Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series* 30 (California, 1984).

[46] E.g. S. Fraade in his Christian and Jewish interpretations of Enosh suggests that in spite of the fact that Church Fathers and Rabbis used the common biblical text, pre-rabbinic tradition and exegetical methods, they offer fundamentally different evaluation of Enosh's person. Fraade explained these varieties of views by expression of theological self-identification of each tradition.

[47] J.L. Kugel, and R.A. Greer eds., *Early Biblical Interpretations* (Philadelphia, 1986).

[48] Rimon Kasher, "The Interpretation of Scripture in Rabbinic Literature," in *Mikra. Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Christianity,* ed. Martin Mulder (Philadelphia: Fotress Press, 1988); William Horbury, "Old Testament Interpretation in the Writings of the Church Fathers," in *Mikra. Text,*

Church Fathers works can be explained by the fact that rabbinic literature itself contains early Jewish interpretations (original biblical texts, Septuagint, Peshita, Apocrypha, writing of Philo, Joseph Flavius and other Jewish authors in Greek translations) known also to Christian milieus. In his opinion, highly important is also non-literary context, e.g. the reading of the Bible in synagogues. Tertullian witnessed that "Jews read the Bible openly… and it is possible to see each Sabbath" (*Apol.* 18:8). There also were personal contacts between Jewish sages and Church fathers such as Origen, Eusebius and Jerome.[49]

Many comparative studies focusing on Jewish–Christian dialogue in general and rabbinic and patristic literature in particular were published in the 1990s. One should mention such studies as: H. Shank *Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism*; J. Lieu, T. Rajak *Jews Among Christians and Pagans;* E. Ferguson *Studies in Early Christianity: A Collection of Scholarly Essays*. About the same time a more profound comparative research of both exegetical traditions was carried out by Marc Hirshman who contrasted and analyzed rabbinic and patristic interpretations of the Bible. Hirshman paid a special attention to the literary genres of interpretations and polemic and analyzed the exegesis of Church Fathers and Rabbis in the context of the Church and the synagogue, trying to determine *Sitz in Leben* of homilies and sermons. Hirshman does not deny interaction between the two exegetical traditions, but also demonstrates important differences. He suggests that rabbinic literature consisted only of community's literature; in his opinion, the Rabbis created literary frames that hid them from the environment and restrained from the adaptation of literary genres widespread in the world of Antiquity. Church Fathers, on the contrary, used genres of classical antique literature and Greek philosophy.[50]

The study of Jewish–Christian exegetical encounters and dialogue did not lose its topicality also at the end of the 1990s and at the beginning of the 21st century. In his article

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Translation, Reading and Interpretation of Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Christianity, ed. Martin Mulder (Philadelphia: Fotress Press, 1988).

[49] William Horbury, "Old Testament Interpretation," 774-775. However, among scholars there are those who skeptically look at the contacts between Jews and Christians. E.g. G. Stemberg argues that one should carry out serious historical research before trying to establish the fact of influence of one tradition upon the other. Church Fathers' quotations of Jewish teachers or Hebrew words do not necessarily testify to real contacts (G. Stemberg, "Exegetical Contacts," 573-575; Adam Kamesar, "Church Fathers and Rabbinic Midrash," 22). B. L. Visotzky does not deny the importance of exegetical encounters, but suggests that parallel development of hermeneutic dialectics in the Church and synagogue is independent phenomena. Both traditions read common Bible and saw in it common problems and vital themes. Therefore, there is no wonder that they used similar rhetorical and grammatical exegetical methods (Burton L. Visotzky, *Fathers of the World*, 39).

[50] Marc Hirshman, *A Rivalry of Genius: Jewish and Christian Biblical Interpretation in Late Antiquity* (Albany, New York: University of New York Press, 1996); cf. the Russian translation (Mark Girshman, *Evreiskaia i khristianskaia interpretatsii Biblii v pozdnei antichnosti* (Moscow-Jerusalem: Gesharim, 2002).

Church Fathers and Rabbinic Midrash (2005) Adam Kamesar examined works of Church Fathers and their corellation with Jewish exegetical tradition; he also analyzed specific terminology of both traditions. Kamesar suggested that the rabbinic midrash was denoted in the writtings of Church Fathers by term *deuterosis*. Strictly speaking *deuterosis* is a translation of the term *mishnah*. In Septuagint the verb *deutero* is used as a translation of Hebrew *šanah* – lit. "to repeat," "to do something second time." The oral Jewish tradition is denoted by this term in the works of Origen and later Fathers. *Deuterois* is not a translation of Mishnah in generally accepted sense, but in the sense widespread in early rabbinic tradition. The term *mishnah* was used in order to denote an integrity of oral tradition; the term *miqra*, similarly, meant the integrity of written tradition. Therefore Mishnah included midrash, Halachah and Aggadah. In patristic literature the term *deutorosis* refers to the oral tradition as a whole. Kamesar also demonstrated that Jewish oral tradition was seen by Church Fathers as "historical" interpretation (*to historikon*) in the sense of classical grammar. There are two types of attitude towards Jewish interpretations: receptive attitude in Alexandrian–Palestinian school and non-receptive or critical in Antiochene school.[51]

In modern studies one often comes across the tendency to understand Judaism and Christianity as allied religions that come from the matrix of Hellenism. Midrash, and patristic exegesis and narrative are often compared to prove the presence of dialogue, symbiosis, and interaction. In the last decade the study of Jewish–Christian exegetical encounters are undertaken within the larger projects. One of the examples is The project "Exegetical encounters between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity" carried out by the Centre for the Study of Jewish Christian Relations is one of such larger projects. The aim of this project is to analyze the evidence of potential encounters between the two traditions and their interpretations of the Bible. Such studies examine not only the influence of rabbinic tradition on the ideas of Church Fathers, but also possible Christian influence on Jewish exegesis. Judeo-Christian encounters are studied in broader historical, social and literal context. The basis of such studies is the western Christian tradition, and Church Fathers who geographically and linguistically were close to the main centers of rabbinic Judaism of Palestine and Babylonia. The subject of such studies is rabbinic and patristic interpretations of the book of Genesis. The scholars pay attention not only to the parallels and similarities in the sources, but also analyze contradictory arguments. The interest of

[51] *Deuterosis* is used as a Jewish term inter alia in the following patristic sources: Origen, Comm. In Cant. Prol.; Jerome, Ep.18(B).20; Augustine, Contr.adv.leg. 2.2; Theodoret, Interpret. In 1 Tim. 1:3-4 (see Adam Kamesar, "Church Fathers and Rabbinic Midrash," 21-23; idem, "The Evaluation of the Narrative Aggada in Greek and Latin Patristic Literature," *Journal of Theological Studies* 45, I (1994): 37-71).

modern scholars in this field testifies to the fact that serious study of Jewish–Christian exegetical encounter is highly important and can influence even the modern Jewish–Christian dialogue and relations .[52]

At this moment two monographs devoted to the comparative analysis of interpretations of some themes of Genesis in Jewish and Christian traditions were published under the auspices of the Cambridge project: E. Kessler *Bound by Bible: Jews, Christians and sacrifice of Isaac*; H. Reuling *After Eden. Church Fathers and Rabbis on Genesis 3:16–21*. E. Kessler starts in his book from the assumption that Jews and Christians have used common sacral biblical text and common exegetical tradition.[53] Therefore, in his opinion, exegetical encounters between the two traditions seem to be highly plausible because Jews and Christians shared similar biblically-oriented cultural heritage. Thus, the study of biblical interpretations can shed light on the interaction between Judaism and Christianity in Late Antiquity. E. Kessler mentions that his exegetical approach is not based on a historical method, or on dating interpretations before or after the rise of Christianity. It does not examine whether one interpretation was a response to another, but simply considers whether an exegetical encounter took place or not. E. Kessler distinguishes five criteria that can prove the existence of an exegetical encounter:

1) an explicit reference to a source;

2) the same scriptural quotations;

3) the same literary form;

4) the same or opposite conclusion;

5) use of a well-known theme which is controversial for Jews and Christians.[54]

H. Reuling adheres in her book to more reserved position, pointing to a fact that Jews and Christians read different Bibles and offered opposite interpretations of biblical passages. Those differences in the interpretations may be explained by ideological perspectives of both religions. Christian exegesis had a disposition to Christological interpretation, that is reading the Bible through the perspective of the New Testament, while the rabbis understood Tanakh through the concept of the perfect Torah.

[52] Detailed information about this project is found in the Internet (www.woolfinstitute.cam.ac.uk/cjcr).
[53] The author certainly realizes that in spite of the fact that Jews and Christians share the Scripture, this biblical text was different in both religions. Christian interpretation depended on the Septuagint and Greek translations from the second century, while the rabbis relied on the Hebrew Masoretic text. The canon of the Bible also differed in Judaism and Christianity. E.g. Jews had a concept of twofold Torah (the Written and the Oral Torah) while Christians possessed two Testaments.
[54] E. Kessler, *Bound by Bible: Jews, Christians and sacrifice of Isaac*, 19-29.

In 2009 a new collection of essays was published.[55] The volume examines the relationship between Jewish and Christian biblical commentators and focus on analysis of interpretations of the book of Genesis. The essays cover a wide range of Jewish and Christian literature, including primarly rabbinic and patristic sources, but also apocrypha, pseudoepigrapha, Philo, Josephus and Gnostic texts.

Now I would like turn specifically to the studies that were dealing with the comparison of the sources my research is dealing with. It is worthwhile mentioning that most of studies were devoted to the analysis of Jewish tradition in Jerome's exegesis rather than in the works of Gregory's of Nyssa and Didymus' of Alexandria. Such an approach is quite understandable, first of all because Jerome quotes in his writings his Jewish teacher; furthermore, one can find in Jerome's writings numerous borrowings from rabbinic sources. Gregory and Didymus, on the contrary, do not make obvious parallels with Jewish exegetical tradition in their writings. This is why there is only a handful of studies that try to compare Gregory's and Didymus' exegesis in general and their commentaries on Ecclesiastes in particular with Jewish sources.

1.3.1. Survey of the studies on Jewish tradition in Jerome's writings

Now I would like to briefly review studies on Jewish tradition in Jerome's writings. It was the abovementioned M. Rahmer's study that was to become the earliest publication on this subject. Rahmer, however, compared Jerome's exegesis only with the compilation *Midrash Rabbah* and did not take into account other midrashim, Talmud, and targumim.[56] Rahmer's work was followed by S. Krauss's "The Jews in the Works of the Church Fathers". Through the analysis of Jerome's writings Krauss demonstrated that Jerome's knowledge of Hebrew had an influence on his Latin and on his literary style. Jerome's works contain much of Jewish tradition which he denoted as *tradition* or *fabulae* because of its narrative form. Krauss suggested that it was a historical aggada.[57] C. H. Gordon criticized previous research and argued that it was important also to compare Vulgate with rabbinic exegesis. Scholar examined Jerome's translation of Proverbs and suggested that in places where Vulgate coincided with rabbinic exegesis, Jerome followed the instructions of his Jewish teacher (in the Jerome's texts this

[55] E. Grypeou, H. Spurling, ed., *The Exegetical Encounter between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).
[56] For the critical evaluation of M. Rahmer's study, see Judith R. Baskin, "Rabbinic-Patristic Exegetical Contacts," 64; C. H. Gordon, "Rabbinic Exegesis in The Vulgate of Proverbs," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 49 (1930), 385.
[57] S. Krauss, "The Jews in the Works of the Church Fathers," 246-253.

teacher is called "Baranina," i.e., most likely, a corruption of "Bar-Haninah").[58] Some years later G. Bardy argued that some Jewish traditions in Jerome's works had not come from the direct contacts with the Jews, but had been borrowed from the works of Origen and Eusebius. In Bardy's opinion some "Jewish" traditions quoted in Jerome's or Origen's writings which are absent in rabbinic literature can be called "lost midrash". [59] E. F. Sutcliffe argued in his article that Jerome did not use Jewish writings in Hebrew. The scholar also examined Jerome's pronunciation of Hebrew and noted that the analysis of his pronunciation could help one to understand the pronunciation of the fourth-century Jews who were his teachers.[60] Another serious work is Jay Braverman's study on Jewish tradition in Jerome's commentary on Daniel. Scholar examines all possible Jewish traditions borrowed by Jerome and included in his commentary. Those traditions did not come only form Jerome's time, but contained also rabbinic thought from previous centuries. For example, in his commentary on Qoh. 4:13–16 and Jes. 8:14, Jerome mentions famous rabbis of the first and second centuries: Barakiba (i.e. "Rabbi Akiba"), Shamai, Hilel, Johannan ben Zakai and Meir. Braverman also describes Jerome's attitude towards the text of the Hebrew Scripture as *veritas hebraica*; he also analyzes Jerome's attitude towards the question of biblical canon.[61] Some later scholars (William Horbury, Benjamin Kedar-Kopfstein, Adam Kamesar) also have examined the influence of Jewish tradition on Jerome's exegesis. B. Kedar-Kopfstein, for example, demonstrates that Jerome frequently alternates his polemic and critic of the Jews and their faith with borrowed Jewish traditions. Jerome also compares typical Jewish titles on his teachers: *scriba* (*sofer*), *sapiens* (*hakham*) and Greek *deuterōtēs* that means *tana*.[62] C. T. R. Hayward translated and provided commentaries to Jerome's "Hebrew Questions on Genesis;" in his study he shows that Jerome's use of rabbinic tradition had mainly two goals: 1) to demonstrate originality of his erudition (in Hayward's view Jerome was the only Church Father who could compile such a voluminous material); and 2) Jerome wished to prove that the knowledge and use of Jewish material was necessary for correct understanding of the Holy Scripture.[63]

A few books and articles published in the nineteenth and in the twentieth century analyzed Jewish tradition in Jerome's commentary on Ecclesiastes. M. Rahmer's *Die*

[58] C. H. Gordon, "Rabbinic Exegesis," 386-387, 415.
[59] For more details, see Judith R. Baskin, "Rabbinic-Patristic Exegetical Contacts," 64-65.
[60] E. F. Sutcliffe, "St. Jerome's Pronunciation of Hebrew," *Biblia* 29 (1948): 112-125.
[61] Jay Braverman, *Jerome's Commentary on Daniel: A Study of Comparative Jewish and Christian Interpretations of Hebrew Bible* (Washington, 1978).
[62] Benjamin Kedar-Kopfstein, "Jewish Traditions in the Writings of Jerome," in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in Their Historical Context,* ed. G. Beattic (Sheffield: JOST, 1994).
[63] C. T. R. Hayward, *Saint Jerome's Hebrew Questions on Genesis* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 19-23.

hebraischen Traditionen bei den Werken des Hieronymus and L. Ginzberg's *Die Haggada bei Kirchenvaeter. Der Komentar des Hieronymus zu Koheleth* were among the earliest studies in this field. These authors were, however, inclined to exaggerate parallels between Jerome's commentary and rabbinic sources.[64] S. Holm-Nielsen, who examined interpretations of Qohelet in Jewish and Christian theology, paid attention also to Jerome's commentary and Midrash Qohelet Rabbah. Having examined the sources, the scholar came to the conclusion that Jerome usually quoted Jewish interpretations together with those by other exegetes. In most cases Jerome did not agree with Jewish interpretations of Qohelet, or even ridiculed them. Jerome never completely accepted Jewish interpretations and looked for further spiritual and Christian meaning of the text. H. Holm-Nielson suggested that Jerome did not use written Jewish sources; in his opinion, all interpretations that he borrowed from the Jews were available to him in oral form.[65] Marc Hirshman devoted a chapter of his study to a comparison of Jerome's commentary on Ecclesiastes with Midrash Qohelet Rabbah. Hirshman suggested that Jerome's adherence to literal interpretation of Bible in Antiochene School could influence Jerome's interest in Jewish interpretations and his conviction of *veritas hebraica*. Jerome also explains his method that unites historical Jewish interpretation with Christian tropological (spiritual) interpretation. The word "historical" was a synonym of literal interpretation (*pshat*). In Hirshman's opinion Greek word *historia* is a direct equivalent of Jewish *midrash*. It means that Jerome has used Jewish exegetical method known as *midrash*. Having analyzed fragments of Jerome's commentary on Ecclesiastes and Qohelet Rabbah, Hirshman concludes that in spite of the fact that there are similarities in these two sources, each of them had different goals and priorities.[66]

Several articles were devoted to the comparative analysis of Jerome's and rabbinic interpretations of particular passages in Qohelet. Anderas Vonach-Innsbruck has published an article about interpretation of Qoh. 11:9–12:7 by Jerome and Midrash Qohelet Rabbah. The scholar thinks that Jerome has borrowed rabbinic tradition in oral form; therefore, one must examine patristic and rabbinic commentaries side by side. Having analyzed Jerome's interpretations Vonach concluded that there are more differences in the sources than similarities. Vonach also argues that abbinic and patristic interpretative traditions do not have similarities in the form and methods of exegesis, but in the content and style.[67] Matthew Kraus more

[64] Judith R. Baskin, "Rabbinic-Patristic Exegetical Contacts," 64.
[65] Sveden Holm-Nielsen, "The Book of Ecclesisastes and the Interpretation of It in Jewish and Christian Theology."
[66] Marc Hirshman, *A Rivalry of Genius*.
[67] Andreas Vonach-Innsbruck, "Der Ton macht Musik. Vorgaben und Normen der Exegese bei Hieronymus und in der rabbinischen Tradition," *Biblische Notizen* 97 (1999): 37-44.

extensively examines the same fragments of Qohelet (Qoh. 11:9–12:7). Kraus suggests that in his interpretation of the abovementioned fragment Jerome not only juxtopposes Jewish and Christian traditions, but also reads and reworks Jewish tradition through classical refractors. Kraus shows that in this case Jerome prefers two Jewish allegorical interpretations. Thus, this fact contradicts the early suggestion that Jerome used Jewish interpretations only in order to comment the text historically and literally.[68]

1.3.2. Survey of the studies on Jewish tradition in Didymus' and Gregory's writings

There are only precious few comparative studies of Gregory's and Didymus' exegesis and rabbinic tradition. H. Reuling, in her comparative study of patristic and rabbinic interpretations of Genesis 3:16–21, analyzed Didymus' commentary on Genesis. The scholar compared this commentary with Philo's and Origen's interpretations and proved that Didymus usually had offered literal and allegorical interpretations. In her opinion, Didymus thought that the words of the biblical text might be read in a literal fashion (historical sense) or be understood in an allegorical sense.[69] More focused study was undertaken by M. Hirshman who compared the commentaries of Greek Fathers on Ecclesiastes (including Gregory and Didymus) and Midrash Qohelet Rabbah. Scholar demonstrated that Christian comments on Ecclesiastes had been preserved in four distinct collections: homilies, school lectures, catena, and commentary. In Hirshman's opinion the development of this particular Christian literature in geographic and temporal proximity to the putative editing of aggadic midrashim invites comparison. Such a comparison would highlight the style and forms each collection preferred and give some indication of how the two traditions constructed Ecclesiastes' message. Hirshman examines five facets of aggadic exegesis of Qohelet Rabbah in the light of the Christian exegesis: 1) "Solomonic" exegesis; 2) identification, allegory and typology; 3) anecdotes; 4) *mashal* (Heb. "parable"); 5) cataloguing. Having compared the sources, the scholar came to the conclusion that each of them formed and created exegesis in his own distinctive manner.[70]

However, none of the abovementioned studies is devoted to understanding *hebel*-concept in the book of Qohelet in rabbinic and patristic sources. Therefore, my thesis shall be a novel and important contribution to the field of theological studies. My research, nevertheless, is not aimed

[68] Matthew Kraus, "Christian, Jews, and Pagans in Dialogue. Jerome on Ecclesiastes 12:1-7," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 70 (1999): 183-231.
[69] H. Reuling, *After Eden. Church Fathers and Rabbis on Genesis 3:16–21* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), 54-80.
[70] Marc Hirshman, "The Greek Fathers and the Aggada on Ecclesiastes. Formats of Exegesis in Late Antiquity," *HUCA* 59 (1988): 137-165.

only at identification of mutual influence and borrowing between two exegetical traditions, rabbinic and patristic. It rather tries to compare Jewish and Christian understanding and reinterpretation of Qohelet on the example of certain rabbinic and patristic sources. Other studies mentioned in this survey are important for better understanding of historical context of relations between two religions and development of exegetical methodology.

II SURVEY OF RABBINIC AND PATRISTIC INTERPRETATION OF QOHELET

2.1. Qohelet Rabbah and other interpretations on Qohelet

2.1.1. The concept of written and oral Torah

Rabbinic exegetical sources on the book of Qohelet belong to the so called oral tradition of rabbinic Judaism. In order to understand the essence of rabbinic reading of Qohelet I shall describe the oral tradition in which our Jewish sources were developed.

The idea of written and oral Torah (Heb. *Tora she-be´al-pe*) arose only within the tradition of the Tannaies.[71] The rabbis-Tannaies believed that when Moses ascended Mount Sinai, God gave him more than Ten Commandments. Actually, Moses received the entire "written Torah", i.e. first five books of Tanah, and "oral Torah". According to rabbis, this oral Torah was ordained by God to be unwritten, orally transmitted interpretation. Both Torah supplement each other. Oral Torah consists of the interpretations and explanations that help to put written Torah into practice. This idea created in rabbinic Judaism the basis of succession that was preserved in spite of various changes of the tradition. The rabbis suggested that written Torah and its oral explanation have been passed from one generation to another in unbroken chain that began with Moses. Thus the rabbis viewed themselves as the only legitimate heirs of the oral Torah and its authoritative interpreters.[72] If we turn directly to rabbinic sources that reflect on the relationship between written and oral Torahs, we can find "literarily" and "orally" inclined representations of oral Torah. The first type of sources, for example, M. Avot 1:1 and B. Eruvin 54b, represents oral Torah as a discrete set of traditions, dictated by God directly and

[71] The transition from pharisaical Judaism to the tannaitic period took place in the period after the destruction of the Temple. However, the concept of Oral Torah was not peculiar to the Pharisees. They derived their biblical exegetical tradition from "traditions of the fathers" or "unwritten law", but did not mention that those traditions were given on Sinai together with written Torah. The phariseian Judaism is closest in its thinking and theology to rabbinic Judaism. In rabbinic sources Pharisees sometimes are denoted as "sages". Therefore, the sages of the Talmud understood themselves as the successors of phariseian tradition. The main distinctions between Pharisees and Tannais consist in that the goal of Pharisees was not the collection, organization and transmission of the tradition. Tannaies on the contrary were engaged in the systematization and transmission of the tradition that later was crowned with creation of Mishnah. The Aramaic word *tanna* itself means a professional keeper of the traditions; his duties were also its memorization and account. Concerning the movement of Pharisees see for example L. H. Schiffman, *Jewish Sectarianism in Second Temple Times* In *Great Schisms in Jewish History* (New York: Center for Judaic Studies and Ktav, 1981), 1-46; J. Neusner, *Rabbinic Traditions about the Pharisees before 70*, 3 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1971); M. Stone, *Scripture, Sects and Visions* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

[72] See also H. Strack and G. Stemberg, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Edinburg: T & T Clark., 1991), 35-49; Rimon Kasher, "The Interpretation of Scripture in Rabbinic Literature," 551-555; E. S. Alexander, "The Orality of Rabbinic Writting," in *The Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, ed. C.E. Fonrobert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 39-57; Shmuel Safrai, and Peter J. Tomson, ed., *The Literature of the Sages. First part*: *Oral Torah, Halakha, Mishnah, Tosefta, Talmud, External Tractates* (Assen, Netherlands : Van Gorcum, 1987), 35-120.

transmitted with an almost literally precision throughout the generations. The Torah received at the end of a long chain of transmission should be the same as the Torah given at the beginning at Sinai. Other sources (B. Menahot. 29b and Seder Eliahu Zuta 2) represent oral Torah as potential interpretations embedded within written Torah that remains dormant until a teacher and students activate it in the classroom. In rabbis' view God wants Israel to derive oral Torah from written Torah. God does not dictate the content of oral Torah directly, but intends for the rabbinic community to do its interpretative work. This understanding of oral Torah suggests that all rabbinic teaching derives its origin with God at Sinai.[73]

2.1.2. The question of dating rabbinic literature.

Main features of rabbinic literature such as oral transmission, long-term redaction and uncertain time of writing are closely connected with the problem of dating. The time of the redaction of Midrash Qohelet Rabbah has been going on in the course of several centuries. Therefore, in order to understand the way one should date Midrash Qohelet Rabbah, one should also discuss the problem of dating rabbinic literature in general. We shall further examine this problem from the perspective of various approaches that had been applied by various scholars.

In literary history there were a few attempts to resolve the question of dating rabbinic literature. Some scholars (Z. Frankel, L. Zunz) attempted to date the final version of the text; nevertheless, layers of individual tradition may be much older than the document as a whole. According to Frankel's and Zunz's studies the putative final redactor of the document should be taken as a criterion for the dating. To give an example, Rabbi (i.e. Yehuda Ha-Nasi) is the redactor of Mishnah; rabbi Hiyya is the editor of Tosefta; Palestinian Talmud is attributed to Yohanan, while Babylonian Talmud to Ashi and Rabina. However, the approach, which focuses mainly on the problem of authorship, does not take into account the fact that rabbinic writings are predominantly compilations. Some scholars attempted to date rabbinic sources on the basis of internal criteria and the external analysis of the document (L. Zunz). In this case the main argument is the date of the first citation of the document. However, this approach does not always work since it was often the case that different sources had the same title. The quotations could have also come from similar writings or from the similar ideas formulated by different rabbinic schools. For example, if Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds do not cite some halakhic midrashim, it does not mean that these midrashim were unknown to the editors of the Talmuds; it

[73] Detailed on those types of the concept of oral Torah see E. S. Alexander, "The Orality of Rabbinic Writting," in *The Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, ed. C.E. Fonrobert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 39-46.

does not mean that they were composed after the Talmuds either. It is also possible to attempt to date the source by the name of the chronologically latest rabbi mentioned in the source; however, one should always take into account the fact that this name could have been added at a later stage or that this could have been a pseudonym. The historical events that are mentioned or presupposed can also help to establish the date of the composition of a source. This, nevertheless, does not mean that every reference to Ishmael or the Arabs necessarily points to the Islamic period. Because of the differences among different chronological stages of the development of the Hebrew language the linguistic criteria are also highly important. This criterion, unfortunately, does not always work either: textual tradition often smoothed out the linguistic peculiarities of a particular period or region. As much as rabbinic texts are a literature of citation, one must expect different linguistic layers within one and the same document. One can attempt to determine the dating of individual texts or particular ideas on the basis of a comparative history of tradition, especially with the references from non-rabbinic literature. The parallels in the pseudepigrapha, at Qumran, in the New Testament, in the Church Fathers or in Arabic literature are also highly important. Nevertheless, one should not automatically assume the constant continuity of an idea between two chronologically distant literary references.

From a position of cultural and religious history the study of Palestine and Babylonia in rabbinic period, archaeological discoveries may be a great contribution to better understanding of the text. Questions of the history of settlement, population structure and economic situation must be also taken into account.

The names of rabbis mentioned in the document often serve as points of reference of dating. But this approach also involves numerous problems. We can mention some of them: 1) the problem of pseudepigraphy, when certain words are put into some rabbi's mouth; 2) often the rabbinic text itself already indicates that the precise name of the tradent is uncertain or the same statement is attributed to various rabbis; 3) often several rabbis have the same name, especially where the father's name is omitted; 4) the textual transmission in manuscripts and printed editions is particularly unstable in the case of names, as a critical apparatus of textual editions clearly shows. Thus, Nathan and Jonathan, Eleazar and Eliezer, Aha and Ahai are constantly confused; 5) where rabbinic parallel traditions attribute the same statement or incident to different rabbis, and this can not be explained by errors of textual transmission; 6) when the text mentions two rabbis of different period discussing with each other. And this is not necessarily the error of redactor; 7) it is especially difficult to date anonymous sayings, but in some cases the parallels can help to identify the speaker; 8) the rabbinic tradition is concerned indeed not with

the precise wording of a teaching but with its content.[74]

The discussion on the dating of rabbinic documents at the same time can raise a question of authorship. It had been already proved in numerous previous studies that rabbinic texts normally do not have one single author; they are normally compilations or anthology of different texts authored by different rabbis. The rabbinic tradition itself testifies that the rabbis are not authors, but "repeaters" (i.e. *tanna'im*) and "explainers" (i.e. *amora'im*). This means that they do not invent, but merely transmit. The sages of late antiquity imagined themselves at most as shapers of what already exists in tradition. The rabbinic literature is the literature of citation and compilation. There are collections of views, generally different or opposed, attributed to various sages, named and unnamed. The result of oral nature of rabbinic tradition is its proclivity to anthologies. Rabbinic culture cultivated a strong oral-performative tradition. Rabbinic documents themselves expressed a context of their origin, where masters and disciples are represented as engaging in discourse over publicly recited text. Having taken into account this feature of oral-performative tradition one should speak about rabbinic collective authorship.[75]

All the nuances mentioned above must certainly be taken into account for the dating of rabbinic literature in particular and for its better understanding in general.

2.1.3. Rabbinic hermeneutic.

Since this dissertation is dealing with a comparison of biblical interpretations, we shall analyze also the most important aspects of rabbinic hermeneutic. Whilst speaking about the historical background of rabbinic Judaism we have mentioned that the study of the Scripture in the schools and synagogues led to the creation of exegetical collections, known as *midrashim*. Nevertheless, one can also find biblical interpretations in other collections whose purpose is not a commentary, such as Mishnah, Tosefta, Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds. The necessity to interpret the Bible was caused by several reasons: possibility of various interpretations of biblical verses or terms; incomprehensibility of the words that are no longer in use; vague formulation of some laws in the Torah; contradictions between diverse verses in the Scriptures. One of the most important moments that induced the sages to the biblical interpretation, were changes of the way of life and social economic structure.

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[74] This overview of the problem of dating rabbinic literature is based on H. Strack's and G. Stemberger's extensive study of the question in *Introduction,* 52-65.

[75] This idea of collective authorship is expressed by Martin S. Jaffe. In his opinion the author of rabbinic Oral Torah was the audience. Martin S. Jaffe, "Rabbinic Authorship as a Collective Enterprise," in *The Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*), 17-35.

The rabbis associated the books of the Scripture with the realm of holiness and distinguished them from other compositions. The books of the Bible were considered as dictated, written and edited with divine inspiration. The Torah was considered as coming directly from the heavens. The conviction of the holiness of the written an oral Torahs and other causes mentioned above motivated the rabbis to work out the rules (Heb. *middot*) of true exegesis and interpretation of the laws. Three systems of the rules were elaborated and differentiated from each other. At the close of the 1st century BC and at the beginning of the 1st century AD rabbi Hillel formulated seven *middot*. Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha in the 2nd century developed them and expanded their number up to thirteen. At the same time, rabbi Eliezer ben Yose ha-Gelili established thirty two *middot*. First two systems served for halakhic exegesis, while the third system was used mostly for aggadic and homiletic interpretations. All the rules of these three systems are expounded in details in Tosefta, Sifra and early tractate of Talmud – *Avot de-rabbi Natan*. There are also certain exegetical methods of the school of rabbi Akiva, who preferred to base midrashim on precise reading of certain words and letters, and not to rely upon exegetical rules.[76]

The examination of rabbinic literature had showed that rabbis also used such methods of exegesis as *peshat* and *derash*. Early tannaitic literature did not make methodological distinction between them; the terms began to signify different methods of exegesis in later amoraic period. *Peshat* usually was used in order to expose the meaning of biblical text by considering its context and using philological insights and historical awareness. *Peshat* method has some features that can be further enumerated. Literalness or literal explanation of the text usually is denoted in rabbinic sources by terms such as / (lit. "as it founds," "as is implied"), (Heb. "the words are as they are written"), (Heb. "and certainly"), (Heb. "actually").[77] In some cases the literal approach is juxtaposed to an allegorical approach; sometimes *peshat* interpretation rejects the literal meaning of the text. *Peshat* approach has also philological aspect that carefully considers the biblical language and derives from multiplicity of meaning for a given word or phrase. Another aspect of *peshat* interpretation is the recognition of synonyms in

[76] More rules of rabbinic hermeneutic of the Bible see in H. Strack, and G. Stemberg, *Introduction,* 17-34 and bibliography; Menahem I. Kahana, "The Halakhic Midrasim," in *The Literature of the Sages Second Part: Midrash, and Targum, Liturgy, Poetry, Mysticism, Contacts, Inscription, Ancient Sceince and Languages of Rabbinic Literatur,* ed. Shmuel Safrai and Zeev Safrai, 13-26; Rimon Kasher, "The Interpretation of Scripture in Rabbinic Literature," in *Mikra. Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Christianity*, 584 -594.

[77] For more information regarding this terminology, see Wilhelm Bacher, *Die exegetische Terminologie der jüdischen Traditionsliteratur* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1965).

the Scripture. One of the characteristics of *peshat* system is the critical approach and critical view of those who raise questions about the Scripture and its interpretation.[78]

Another method of interpretation is *derash* or (most common) *midrash.* As has been mentioned, *derash* as the study of the Torah is found already in the Bible (e.g. Ezra 7:10). As the method of rabbinic investigation and interpretation of the Scripture it was used also in mishnaic period and even later, when early tannaitic midrashim were created. Strictly speaking, the term *midrash* denotes at the same time the method of interpretation, and the compilations of rabbinic interpretations of a certain biblical book. However, in spite of this concrete definition, there are many scholarly studies that propose different conceptions, definitions and characterizations of *midrash*. Some scholars emphasized social and educational purpose of *midrash* (Zunz, Lieberman, Child, Verms). They defined *midrash* as a process that actualize the text for rabbis themselves and for their audience. Thus, the interpretation looked for the connection between biblical text and concrete present situation. Midrashic methodology was based on absolute and practical exegesis. Often midrash expounds the Bible not in order to investigate its actual meaning and to understand the documents of the past, but in order to find religious edification, moral instruction, and sustenance for the thoughts and feelings of the present.[79]

Other scholars attempted to characterize midrash by its literary genre. The genre as a system and technique is midrashic process; nevertheless, there are also subgenres in midrash such as *halakha* and *aggada (Haggadah).*[80] Midrash is a literature about literature that attempts to make the biblical text clear, significant and essential for the next generations.[81] The phenomenon of midrash was also discussed in the context of literary theory. J. Kugel suggested that the essence of midrash was not only a genre of interpretation, but a position of interpretation, and the type of the reading of the Bible.[82] In M. Fishbane's opinion, according to rabbinic culture, the meaning of the Scripture never has been predetermined – it depended largely on creative reading. [83] D. Boyarin argued that midrash represented most probably the intertextual reading of the canon where one part of the text interprets other. The rabbis tried to smooth out

[78] For more details on *peshat* interpretation, see Rimon Kasher, *The Interpretation of Scripture in Rabbinic Literature*, 553-560.
[79]Gary G. Porton, "Defining Midrash," in *Encyclopedia of Midrash. Biblical Interpretation in Formative Judaism,* ed. Jacob Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 1: 59-60; Renee Bloch, "Midrash," in *Aproaches to Ancient Judaism: Theory and Practice* (Missowa: Scholars Press for Brown Judaic Studies, 1978), 29-50.
[80] Dalia Hoshen, "Genres and Midrash," in *Encyclopedia of Midrash*, 124.
[81] Addison G. Wright, *The Lierary Genre Midrash* (New York: 1967), 52-59.
[82] See Timothy H. Lim, "Origins and Emergence of Midrash in Relation to the Hebrew Bible," in *Encyclopedia of Midrash*, 601.
[83] Michael Fishbane, *The Exegetical Imagination. On Jewish Thought and Theology* (Cambridge, Mass: HUP, 1998), 2.

the contradictions in the Torah and understand its meaning by using their intertext or cultural codes.[84] Some scholars emphasized the technique and methods of midrash. In scholarly research there also was an attempt to establish the connection between rabbinic exegesis and Hellenistic rhetoric. D. Daube and S. Lieberman, for example, suggested that many technical terms used by rabbis in fact are Hebrew translations of Greek rhetorical tradition. In spite of the fact that the rabbis did not borrow Greek exegetical principles, they borrowed formulations, terminology, and systematization of these principles.[85] Other scholars emphasized religious purpose of midrash. Midrash was understood not only as exegetical technique, but also as the significant factor in the development of Jewish religious tradition.[86] Some scholars argued that the definition of midrash must be broad enough – to be able to include various interpretative traditions and activities of the Jewish community of Palestine and Babylonia.[87]

Like *peshat*-approach *midrash* also has its methodological characteristics. In contrast to *peshat*, *midrash* usually explains the biblical text using a non-literal approach. The sages argued that anthropomorphic and material description of God in the Bible were used only to make things easier for men to understand. Sometimes the rabbis considered some verse superfluous (if this verse could be interpreted literally). The rabbis often rejected the literal meaning of the text in order to resolve contradictions among several legal texts. In the method of midrash each and every detail normally has its own significance. The midrasic interpretation also assumed that the Scripture may contain many different levels of meaning. Midrash often creates analogies between different verses because it considers the Bible as a single monolithic unit. Midrashic method is very free in its philological approach. The sages were engaged to interpret the meaning of each and every expression of the Scripture. The midrashic interpretation assigns the meanings even to the tiniest unit of a language, i.e. the letter. The importance attached to each and every letter is also expressed through the rabbis' use of *notarikon*. Each letter of a word is interpreted as the beginning of a word – so that a word is a string of first initials – or as composed of two separate words.[88] The use of *gematria*, the numerical values of each Hebrew letter, is another

[84] D. Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 16.
[85] Gary Porton, "Rabbinic Midrash," in *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, ed. J. Neusner (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 225; S. Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1950), 78, 47-82.
[86] Ithamar Grünwald, "Midrash and "Midrashic Condition:" Preliminary Considirations," in *The Midrashic Imagination. Jewish Exegesis, Thought and History*, ed. M. Fishbane (Albany: University of New York Press, 1993), 6-7.
[87] Gary G. Porton, "Defining Midrash," 62, 82; Lieve Teugels, "Midrash in the Bible or Midrash on the Bible? Critical Remarks about Uncritical Use of Term," in *Bibel und Midrasch. Zur Bedeutung der rabbinische Exegese für die Bibelwissenschaft*, ed. G. Bobendorfer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 48, 55.
[88] S. Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, 69; Wilhelm Bacher, *Die exegetische Terminologie der jüdischen Traditionsliteratur*, 125-127.

example of the rabbis' wish to assign meaning to each and every letter. Often grammatical forms are interpreted without relating them to their context; the syntactical structure of the verse is destroyed, while linguistically late terms are projected back into the Bible, and the meaning of words is established on tenuous comparison.[89]

Rabbinic midrashim of tanna'im and amora'im usually are divided into halakhic and aggadic. Rabbinic interpretations on Qohelet are aggadic in their nature. While halakhic midrashim are engaged in interpretation of the legal side of the Scripture, aggadic midrashim do not have a character of religious-juridical regulation. Aggadic literature was probably created as a result of the spiritual struggle of its creators among themselves or between them and foreign beliefs and other cultures. This is why midrashim are often replete with stories of dialogue not only among the sages themselves, but also with pagans, heretics, and Christians. Aggada[90] includes creative interpretation of the Bible, the tales of the sages and their disciples, parables (Heb. *mashalim*), legends, maxims, poetry, prayers, hyperbole, jokes, medical discussions, astrology, geography, biology, folk tales, incantations, words of consolations, messianic promises, historical documents, and philosopho-theological deliberations. Such methods as various types of glosses, identifications, *petihta*[91] or proems are also often used in aggadic midrash. The word aggada was used by tanna'im and amora'im to describe both subject matter and a manner of study. Aggadic midrashim are usually divided into exegetical and homiletical. Nevertheless, they can sometimes combine both modes of midrashic exposition.[92]

2.1.4. Place of the book of Qohelet in Jewish canon

The books of TaNaKh were included in Jewish canon largely on the basis of three most important principles: these books were authoritative guides for Jewish practice and belief; they were topical for all times; they were studied in public and private circles.[93] The attitude of

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[89] For more examples of this lack of consideration for the biblical language, see Rimon Kasher, *Interpretation of Scripture in Rabbinic Literature*, 573-575; Y. Heinemann, *Darkei ha-aggada* (Jerusalem, 1954).

[90] The word and its aramaicized form probably come from the verb (to tell). For more information regarding the term *aggada*, see W. Bacher, "The Origin of Word Haggada (Agada)," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 4 (1892): 406-429. The scholar suggested that the term came from the common phrase (Heb. "Scripture teaches").

[91] *Petihta* (opening) is rhetorical-literary formula utilized by the sages as introduction to their exposition of the Scripture. The interpretation of a verse was undertaken by reference to a second remote verse.

[92] See also recent works on aggadic midrash (Marc Hirshman, "Aggadic Midrash," in *The Literature of the Sages*, 107-132; Myron B. Lerner, "The Works of Aggadic Midrash and the Ester Midrashim," in *The Literature of the Sages*, 133-176; Avigdor Shinan, *The World of the Aggadah* (Tel Aviv: MOD Books, 1990), 11-22). While speaking about the Midrash Qohelet Rabbah we shall return to the abovementioned stylistic and exegetical features of the aggadic midrash (see below, section 2.2.3).

[93] On canon of biblical books in Jewish tradition, see S. Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence* (Hamden, 1976).

rabbinic circles to the book of Qohelet was not unonimous. Rabbinic tradition did not question the place of Qohelet in biblical canon; nevertheless, it doubted the concept that Qohelet, as well as other biblical books, was inspired by God.[94] Rabbis on the whole recognized Qohelet as a sacred book – largely because it was authored by the king Solomon. They did not take into account the fact that Qohelet never refers to himself as Solomon. Nevertheless, when discussing the origin of Qohelet, the rabbis argued that the book was not written in the spirit of prophesy. Some rabbis suggested that Qohelet's views are contrary to the spirit and teaching of the Torah, and therefore are not inspired. There are some fragments in Mishnah which discuss the status of Qohelet. For example, in Mishnah Eduyot 5:3 rabbi Shimon claims that Qohelet does not make the hands impure (this is according to the school of Shammai). The school of Hillel, nevertheless, says: "It does make the hands impure." The ambiguous phrase "makes the hands impure" indicates the book which is considered to be divinely inspired. The origin of this idiom is found in Shabbat 14A. According to this Talmudic tradition, the priestly *terumah* (the part of the harvest granted to the Temple) was originally stored near the scrolls of the Torah in the Temple. Since both were considered to be holy, they were allowed to be placed together. However, it was discovered that mice were eating the *terumah*, and along with it were damaging the Torah scrolls. It was therefore decreed that the Torah scrolls imparted impurity, so that they no longer to be stored near *terumah*. From this particular incident came the general notion that all scripture "makes the hand impure".[95] Consequently, according to rabbinic logic, if the book of Qohelet was in the Temple near the priestly *terumah* – it also makes the hands impure and therefore it is inspired.

Mishnah Yadayim 3:5 contains the debates of early rabbis of the second and third generation of tannaim concerning the status of Qohelet. The second-generation tannaim (rabbi Shimon ben Azzai, rabbi Elazar ben Azariah, rabbi Akiba) decided that Qohelet is inspired book; the third-generation tannaim (rabbi Judah, rabbi Yosi) continued the debates. Tosefta (Yadayim 2:13) casts further doubt on the the inspired status of Qohelet. Rabbi Shimon b. Menasiya argues that Qohelet does not make the hands impure because it is only the wisdom of Solomon that was not said by the Holy Spirit. However, in spite of the abovementioned rabbinic criticism of Qohelet, it was not seen as heretical in Tannaitic period.

In Talmud Shabbat 30b one can find the discussion on the condradictory nature of Qohelet. However, in spite of its contradictions, Qohelet was not rejected by rabbis because its

[94] Ibid., 115.
[95] For discussion about this idiom, see ibid.

opening and closing thoughts were appropriate religious teaching. At its beginning are words of the Torah (1:3) and at its end are words of the Torah (12:13). Thus, according to rabbis, at the beginning Qohelet argues that there is no profit in any wordly labour except the labour in the Torah. And the end of the book calls to the fear of God and the observance of the commandments. [96]

Midrash Qohelet Rabbah also contains some debates on canonicity of Qohelet. The interpretation of the verse 1:3, for example, has parallel with the abovemention fragment of the Talmud. It is also interesting that while interpreting Qohelet's message, midrash frequently does not agree with its meaning. Feeling the condradiction with the teaching of the Torah it offers the reading that is not found in the biblical text. Therefore, in the process of the interpretation the rewriting of the text takes place. One shall see numerous examples of this reinterpretation in our analysis of the fragments of Qohelet Rabbah.

2.1.5. Early rabbinic interpretations of Qohelet.

The early rabbis did not write commentaries (*midrashim*) on any wisdom book of the Bible and showed little interest in the wisdom of biblical sages. Tannaitic use of Qohelet is predominantly epigrammatic. Anonymous sections of Tannaitic literature used proverbs or apothegms from Qohelet – and applied them to a particular situation. For example, Hillel's proverbs at Tosefta Berachot 2:24 resolve into Qoh. 3:4–5. Another type of use is the epitomization of a biblical figure or rabbi's behavior in a certain situation by the verse drawn from Qohelet. Most of Tannaitic interpretations of Qohelet were attributed to rabbi Yishmael who seems to have a special relationship with Qohelet. For rabbi Yishmael Qohelet was fully integrated into the exegetical canon. [97]

There are also fragmentary interpretations of some passages of Qohelet in another midrashim (for example, Leviticus Rabbah and Genesis Rabbah), and in Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds. Among other important Jewish sources on Qohelet one can mention Targum Qohelet. There is close relationship between the interpretations of Targum and Qohelet Rabbah. They both contain the normative rabbinic interpretations of the Book of Qohelet. The

[96] For more details, see R. N. Sandberg, *Rabbinic Views of Qohelet* (Lewiston: Mellen Biblical Press, 1999), 18-26; S. Leiman, *The Canonization*; S. Friedman, "The Holy Scriptures Defile the Hands: The Transformation of a Biblical Concept in Rabbinic Theology," in *Minha le-Nahum, JSOT Supplement,* ed. M. Brettler and M. Fishbane (1993): 154.

[97] See also Sifre Numbers (Parashat Tzizit, piska 155), Sifre Deuteronomy (piska 1), Tosefta Megilla 3:15. For more extensive information on early rabbinic interpretations of Qohelet, see Marc Hirshman, "Qohelet's Reception and Interpretation in Early Rabbinic Literature," in *Studies in Ancient Midrash,* ed. James L. Kugel (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Center for Jewish Studies, 2001).

great similarity between the exegesis of the midrash and the targum suggests that these sources were redacted about the same time and drew on similar sources.[98]

2.1.6. Midrash Qohelet Rabbah

Midrash Qohelet Rabbah is reckoned among midrashic compilations denoted as Midrash Rabbah. These compilations are rabbinic interpretations of the Torah, Ester, Ruth, Lamentation, and Song of Songs. Some of printed editions of this midrash were published under the title *Midrash Qohelet*.[99]

Dating and origin

It is problematic to determine the time of the compilation of Midrash Qohelet Rabbah for the lack of data about it in midrash itself.[100] The scholars suggest that the present version of this midrash was formed from the 5th through the 7th centuries.[101] However, in spite of the fact that the complete version of Qohelet Rabbah does not predate the 7th century, its literary traditions are much more ancient. [102] Available text of the midrash has formed as the result of deliberate work of the editor who had at his disposal numerous literary sources. Having borrowed earlier tradition of ammora'im,[103] the editor had revised it and used it in the new context. Palestinian aggadic tradition is the basic source of Qohelet Rabbah; on the other hand, there is no doubt that the editor was also acquainted with Babylonian tradition.[104] While forming the structure of the midrash the editor tried to bring division of the text to the conformity with tradition of public

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[98] For more details on the connection between Targum and Qohelet Rabbah, see, *The Targum of Qohelet. Translation with Critical Introduction, Apparatus and Notes*, trans. Peter S. Knobel. *The Aramaic Bible* 15 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press,1991), 11-15;

[99] See the following editions: Pesaro (1519), Constantinople (1520), Giustiniani (1545). See important studies on Midrash Qohelet Rabbah: Lazar Grünt, *Kritische Untersuchung des Midrash Kohelet Rabba* (Berlin, 1982); Johannes Watchen, *Midrasch-Analyze. Strukturen im Midrasch Qohelet Rabba* (Hildescheim-New York: Georg Olms, 1978); Menachem Hirshman, *Midrash Qohelet Rabbah: Chapters 1-4*, JTS Dissertation (New York, 1983) (in Hebrew); Reuven Kiperwasser, *Midrashim on Kohelet: Studies in Their Redaction and Formation,* PhD Dissertation (Ramat Gan, 2005) (in Hebrew).

[100] *Midrash Rabbah. Ecclesiastes*, trans. by A. Cohen. (London: Soncino, 1957), vii.

[101] Marc Hirshman, "The Greek Fathers and the Aggada on Ecclesiastes. Formats of Exegesis in Late Antiquity," in *HUCA* 59 (1988): 137; A. Vonach-Innsbruck, "Der Ton macht Musik. Vorgaben und Normen der Exegese bei Hieronymus und in der rabbinischen Tradition," *Biblische Notizen* 97 (1999): 37.

[102] J. Watchen, *Midrasch-Analyze*, 10.

[103] According to Reuven Kiperwasswer, earlier ammoraic texts included Early Midrash on Qohelet. This text was seriously changed before it got the form that is known today (Reuven Kiperwasser, "Structure and Form in Kohelet Rabbah as Evidence of Its Redaction," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 57, 2 (2007): 284).

[104] R. Kiperwasser, "Structure and Form in Kohelet Rabbah," 284; H. Strack, and G. Stemberger, *Introduction*, 345; *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Fred Skolnik (New York: Keter, 2007), 90; *Midrash Rabbah. Ecclesiastes*, vii; A. Wünsche, *Die Midrasch Kohelet* (Hildescheim: Georg Olms, 1967), xiv; Marc Hirshman, "The Greek Fathers and the Aggada on Ecclesiastes," 137.

reading. The redactor also added prologue, the so-called *petiha*, compiled from the prologues of the sources that were at his disposal. The commentary on Qohelet 12: 1 – 7 is, for example, compiled from the prologue of Leviticus Rabbah 18 and *petiha* of Lamentation Rabbah 23. The redactor's own commentaries and brief interpretations (*derashot*) were also added to Qohelet Rabbah.[105]

Louis Ginzberg, when studying and comparing Qohelet Rabbah and Jerome's commentary on Ecclesiastes, expressed an opinion that there had been earlier material in the midrash; furthermore, he suggested that this material had some connection with Jerome's work. Scholar concluded that Jerome's treatise included Jewish interpretations that were included also in Qohelet Rabbah. This fact is unquestionable evidence of the existence of such rabbinic interpretations in the fourth century A.D. This does not mean that Qohelet Rabbah was available in the form that is known to us today; however, it is possible that this compilation was based on the older tradition.[106]

The scholars agree that Palestine was the place of the origin of Midrash Qohelet Rabbah. They came to this conclusion largely because of the fact that within this midrash Palestinian tradition evidently prevails over Babylonian tradition. The style and the language of the midrash also resemble Palestinian school of the sages.[107] Qohelet Rabbah is composed in mishnaic Hebrew; nevertheless, Aramaic and some Greek words are also to be found there.[108]

Manuscripts, printed editions and translations of Midrash Qohelet Rabbah

All extant manuscripts of Qohelet Rabbah are of late origin; the first printed edition dates back to the 16th century. Ms. Vatican heb 291,11b is the oldest manuscript of the midrash which dates back to ca. 1417; ms. Oxford 164,2 is from ca. 1513. The manuscript Jerusalem heb 8^0 2492,13 is a part of the collection of manuscripts that belonged to the Jewish community of Vienna before the Second World War. First printed version was published by Pesaro (1519). Constantinople manuscript is dated to ca. 1520 and also includes midrashim on five *megilot* (or five scrolls, namely Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther). The third significant printed edition is Venice edition of 1545. There are also manuscript fragments in ms.

[105] R. Kiperwasser, "Structure and Form in Kohelet Rabbah," 284. Marc Hirshman demonstrated that editors most likely felt free to reduce, add, combe, and transfer the material (M. Hirshman, "Aggadic Midrash," 146).
[106] Quoted from the book of M. Girshman, *Evreiskaia i khristianskaia interpretatsii*, 115-116.
[107] *Midrash Rabbah Ecclesiastes*, vii.
[108] *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 90.

Vatican heb 44,12; these fragments include commentary on Qohelet 7:8. Geniza fragments include interpretations on Qoh. 1:1f, 5:14, 16,19, 6:1-3.[109]

While speaking about modern translations, it is worthwhile mentioning that Midrash Qohelet Rabbah is translated into English and German. The German translation was carried out by A. Wuensche in 1880; A. Cohen translated the midrash into English in 1930.[110]

The structure

Midrash Qohelet Rabbah follows the text of Qohelet verse by verse. Twelve parts of the book do not appear in the early manuscripts and printed editions of midrash. The text of Qohelet Rabah is divided into three *sedarim* (Heb. "sections / orders") [111] This division into sedarim resembles masoretic division of the biblical text. The redactor of the midrash was apparently influenced by the tradition of public reading of the Bible that was widespread in his time. Therefore he compiled the midrash to demonstrate liturgical practice.[112] Qohelet Rabbah interprets 222 verses of Qohelet separately or groups them. The midrash explains more than a half of the verses in their entirety; some verses are explained fragmentarily. Nevertheless, practically every idea and concept of Qohelet is explained and commented upon. In the printed editions of the midrash 15 verses from 222 remained not interpreted (namely Qoh. 1:17; 2:11, 22; 4:4, 11; 5:3; 7:10, 21, 22, 24, 25; 8:7, 12; 9:1, 3). One can, however, minimize this number by modifying the verses. For example, verses 4:11 and 7:10 are used as evidence of the exposition of Qoh. 3:11 and 1:4. In spite of this, interpretations of Qoh. 8:12 and 9:1 are absent in printed editions; in the manuscripts of Oxford and the Vatican they are explained together with exposition. The Oxford manuscript also partly quotes verses 7:21, 22 and 8:7. Other 118 verses are interpreted in their entirety, 89 verses are treated partly. [113] In addition to interpretations of particular verses, in Qohelet Rabbah one can also find group interpretations. Group interpretations are interpretations of a sequence from two to seven verses. For example, verses 2:4-8; 2:14-16; 3:2-8; 4:9-12 (without verse 11); 4:13f; 5:8f; 9:14f; 10:16f; 12:1-7.[114]

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[109] For more details regarding manuscripts and printed edition, see Johannes Watchen, *Midrasch-Analyze,* 10- 31.
[110] Ibid., 41.
[111] The first *sidrā* is from the verse 1:1 to 6:12, second from 7:1 to 9:6, but the third from 9:7 to the last verse of the twelfth part of the book. Abraham Cohen argues that the text is divided into four sedarim; the first begins from 1:1, second from 3:13, third from 7:1 but fourth from 12:7 (*Midrash Rabbah. Ecclesiastes,* viii; A. Wünsche, *Die Midrasch Kohelet,* xiv).
[112] R. Kiperwasser, "Structure and Form in Kohelet Rabbah," 284.
[113] Johannes Watchen, *Midrasch-Analyze,* 56, 59; R. Kiperwasser, "Structure and Form in Kohelet Rabbah," 299, ft. 48.
[114] Ibid., 64-65.

Style and genre of Midrash Qohelet Rabbah

Midrash Qohelet Rabbah is a consecutive aggadic exegetical midrash. It is not a commentary in the literal sense of the word, but rather a compilation of different rabbinic opinions and expressions. The aim of the midrash is usually not only to explain the sense of the biblical text, but to adapt the text to contemporary situation and views. Qohelet Rabbah sometimes does not explain the words of Qohelet, but uses the text as the means for the exposition of some theme that was topical at that time.[115]

Like other aggadic midrashim, Qohelet Rabbah also includes creative interpretation using variety of genres. One can find in this midrash the tales of the sages and their disciples, parables (*mashalim*), legends, maxims, poetry, prayers, hyperbole, jokes, medical discussions, astrology, geography, biology, folk tales, incantations, words of consolations, messianic promises, historical documents, and philosophic-theological deliberations.[116]

Hereby we would like to analyze the main of genres of Qohelet Rabbah using M. Hirshman's study as the basis. The first facet of aggadic exegesis mentioned by Hirshman is the so-called "Solomonic" exegesis. For example, in the interpretation of Qoh.2:4–8 each of Qohelet's empire-building activities receives a scriptural parallel from Solomon's biography. The main sources for such references are Chronicles and the book of Kings. The main goal of this type of exegesis is to unify the Scriptural message, intertwining the diverse strands of the Bible into a consistent whole. The redactor of the midrash obviously understood the Torah, Nevi'im and Qetuvim as a unified entity. [117]

Second exegetical aspect is triple and includes identification, allegory, and typology. In Hirshman's opinion, however, these aspects are identical. More widespread exegetical approach in Qohelet Rabbah is identification (Heb. *zihuy*). This terminology is proposed by I. Heineman and takes its origin from the word *zeh* "this". Verses of general importance are related to a specific individual, event or object drawn either from the Bible or from the midrash's contemporary surroundings. For example, Qoh.1:11 "There is no remembrance of them of former times" is understood as a reference to the generation of the flood, the Egyptians and the miracles which Israel experienced after the exodus from Egypt. The "gardens and parks" in Qoh.

[115] A. Vonach-Innsbruck, "Der Ton macht Musik," 37-38; S. Holm-Nielsen, "The Book of Ecclesisastes and the Interpretation of It in Jewish and Christian Theology," 79; A. Wünsche, *Die Midrasch Kohelet,* xiv.
[116] Marc Hirshman examines five aggadic exegetical methods of Qohelet Rabbah and compares it with Greek commentaries on Qohelet and Christian exegesis (M. Hirshman, "The Greek Fathers and the Aggada on Ecclesiastes").
[117] Andreas Vonach-Innsbruck, "Der Ton macht Musik," 38.

2:5 allude to the great collection of Mishna. This *zeh* approach is very elastic while Qohelet Rabbah offers numerous alternatives for each identification. [118]

M. Hirshmann suggested that the identification in Qohelet Rabbah is closely related to allegory and typology. There is allegorical interpretation in the commentary on Qoh. 2:24: "All references to eating and drinking in this Book signify Torah and good deeds". Qohelet Rabbah frequently offers typological treatment of Ecclesiastes. One may mention such subjects of typology as Adam and Ahab, messiah and the sage, school-children and God himself. The effect of the use of typology is twofold. By using biblical characters in interpretation of Qohelet the midrash develops the concept of unity and integrity of the Scripture. The second effect is connected with contemporaneity. Identification of the references in the verses of Qohelet extends from biblical figures to present-day.[119]

The third subgenre in Qohelet Rabbah is anecdotes. Anecdotes or *chria* in the midrash usually illustrate moral or theological points and revolve around the rabbinic sage or touch on the lives of common people.[120] For example, the interpretations of Qoh. 2:18, 3:2, 3:6 belong to this genre.[121] The rabbis tried to amuse their reader-listener with a good tale and its fine exegetical fancy. However, the underlying message was normally not articulated. Anecdotes represent basis for material of Qohelet Rabbah and fill exegetical role. It is possible that in rabbinic times collections of stories and anecdotes circulated in rabbinic circles in one form or another.[122]

The next genre used in Qohelet Rabbah is *meshalim* (sing. *mashal*) or parables. There are 53 meshalim in this midrash.[123] *Mashal* is the narrative form of midrash; meshalim usually originated from sermons in synagogues and lection in rabbinic schools. Midrash is literal form of mashal; it normally plays exegetical role in midrash. Mashal also is an ideological narrative; rabbis used it in order to influence the audience by their views and authority.[124]

Lists and catalogues represent another specific genre feature of Midrash Qohelet Rabbah. In general, catalogues are characteristic literal genre of aggadic literature. For example, 52 entry concordance of scripture relating to the heart and its functions at the end of chapter on of Qohelet

[118] Marc Hirshman, "The Greek Fathers and the Aggada on Ecclesiastes," 158.
[119] Marc Hirshman demonstrated that the use of typology in Qohelet Rabbah differed from its use in commentaries of Church Fathers. The Fathers did not read the history of the Church in Qohelet by using typology. Typology was used in order to associate Qohelet with Jesus (ibid., 159).
[120] Ibid., 160.
[121] Johannes Watchen, *Midrasch-Analyze*, 214.
[122] M. Hirshman, "The Greek Fathers and the Aggada on Ecclesiastes," 161.
[123] For more details, see Johannes Watchen, *Midrasch-Analyze*, 264-266.
[124] On mashal in rabbinic midrash, see David Stern, *Midrash and Theory. Ancient Jewish Exegesis and Contemporary Literary Studies* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University, 1996), 39-45.

Rabbah. In interpretation of Qoh.1:8 ("All things are wearisome") Qohelet Rabbah also tries to catalogue. Midrash offers four separate interpretations of "all things": 1) idle words; 2) handicrafts; 3) heretical words; 4) words of the Torah.[125] Qohelet Rabbah uses the catalogues and forms the framework and structure in order to house its material.

While speaking about "Sitz im Leben" of Midrash Qohelet Rabbah one schould start from the analysis of social and educational purpose of midrashic literature. Generally speaking, *midrash* is a process that actualize the biblical text for rabbis themselves and for their audience. Thus, the interpretation looked for the connection between biblical text and concrete present situation. Midrashic methodology was based on absolute and practical exegesis. Like other aggadic midrashim, Qohelet Rabbah often expounds the Bible not in order to investigate its actual meaning and to understand the documents of the past, but in order to find religious edification, moral instruction, and sustenance for the thoughts and feelings of the present. Qohelet Rabbah often does not agree with Qohelet's world-view and conclusions but rewrites the text. This midrash does so in order to struggle against the pessimism of the book and to make it acceptable for religious teaching of Judasim.

2.2. Didymus' Commentary on Ecclesiastes

The commentary on Ecclesiastes of Didymus of Alexandria[126] is one of the five Tura commentaries found in1941 in a cave not far from Cairo. Generally, the discovery of collections known as "Tura papyri" made substantial addition to our knowledge of Didymus' Bible exegesis, theology and also of early Christian educational practices and institutions. The commentary on Ecclesiastes is highly similar to the commentary on Psalms. Both works have remained in cursive script and have a form of co-recording of oral lectures. These texts were designated as school lectures (Germ. *Kollegnachschriften*).[127] The stenograph has recorded the questions and audience's objections. The original evidence of Didymus' school activity is for the first time available to us in the form of these school lectures. We have unique evidence of direct speech of

[125] *Midrash Rabbah. Ecclesiastes*, 25; M. Hirshman, "The Greek Fathers and the Aggada on Ecclesiastes," 163.

[126] Only a few studies have been dedicated to Didymus of Alexandria and his work so far. In general, studies on the fourth-century Church and theology have briefly examined Didymus' biography and works. E.g. J. Leipoldt, J. Leipoldt, *Didymus der Blind von Alexandria,* in Texte und Untersuchungen, 14, 3 (Leipzig: Druck von August Pries, 1905); G. Bardy, *Didyme l'Aveugle* (Paris, 1910). Practically everything that we know about Didymus' life was collected by Lenain de Tillemont in the tenth volume of his *Memories pour server à l'histoire ecclesiastique des six premiers siecles* (Lenain de Tillemont, *Memories pour server à l'histoire ecclesiastique des six premiers siecles*. Volume X (Brussels, 1730), 135-152).

[127] Didymus der Blinde. Kommentar zum Ecclesiastes. Lage 22 und 23 des Tura Papyrus, ed. Leo Liesenborghs (Köln, 1965),12.

Didymus. The significance and value of these commentaries is very important for the study of theology and exegesis of Didymus.[128] The fact that Didymus is the author of this commentary is evident from the comparison of this work with Didymus' other commentaries. This assumption is also corroborated by the study of Didymus' other writings.

The fragments of catenae of Didymus' commentary on Ecclesiastes have not survived. It is known that Jerome and Olympiodorus have used Didymus' writings in their commentaries on Ecclesiastes.[129] It seems that the commentary has initially consisted of 378 papyrus pages. Only 282 papyrus pages have remained from this number. Some pages consist only of fragments. Furthermore, their condition is very bad which makes the reconstruction of the text even more difficult.[130]

The teaching activity of Didymus took place between 345 and 395. There is no clear evidence of the date of the composition of the commentary. Some facts allow us to suggest possible dating. Didymus mentions the origenistic term "Apokastasis;" this means that he uses this term at the end of the fourth century, the time when this term was discussed. Therefore, the whole commentary was composed at the end of the fourth century. If we understand the text of the papyrus page 356, 8-9 historically (or probably autobiographically) then a big and long crisis after Athanasius's death is implied in this fragment. Polemic against Apollinaris of Laodicea (p. 154) testifies to the time of the condemnation of Apolinaris. Therefore the commentary was composed between the years 377 and 381 C.E. The papyrus pages found in the Tura are dated to the sixth century.[131]

There are several criteria that indicate that this commentary was a "Schul Produkt": 1) lack of clarity in the train of thought, lacunae, repetitions, and a spoken style; 2) relatively copious citation of previous lessons; 3) questions and objections injected by the audience. The editors assume that the fraternity between teacher and pupil is reflected in the direct address employed by both parties of the dialogue. The questions generally appear at the end of the exegesis of the lemma. This work does not fit the literary mold of the standard commentary and owes its style to the setting of "the College".[132] Fielding questions, justifying his methodology, drawing on everyday occurrences – all serve to accentuate the "live" character of Didymus

[128] Wolfgang A. Bienert, "*Allegoria" und "Anagoge" bei Didymos dem Blinden von Alexandria,* in *Patristische Texte un Studien*, Band 13 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1972), 23.
[129] *Didymus der Blinde. Kommentar zum Ecclesiastes. Lage 22 und 23 des Tura Papyrus,* 16.
[130] Wolfgang A. Bienert, "*Allegoria" und "Anagoge",* 28.
[131] *Didymus der Blinde. Kommentar zum Ecclesiastes. Lage 22 und 23 des Tura Papyrus,* 11, 13.
[132] Didymus der Blinde, *Kommentar zum Ecclesiastes* (Tura Papyrus), ed. Gerhard Binder and Leo Liesenborghs, Teil 1.1. (Bonn, 1978), 11-12.

"commentary". The sign of a school setting is the wealth of illustrative material. Didymus draws on the realm of medicine (21:17; 39:9), philosophy (37:8), physiology (33:18), and even choreography (41:5) to illustrate his ideas. Another indication is his particular fondness for examples derived from the world of education (8:18-23; 10:27; 11:33). His penchant for examples from the world of education can be seen as the teacher's ability to adapt his language to the audience.[133] Tere are also sermonettes in the commentary, in which Didymus appeals to his audience to imitate the model behavior portrayed in Scripture (36:12-18; 38:7). Another feature is the former's digressions. Didymus executes elaborate exegeses of passage from other parts of Scripture, minilectures on related topics (41:25). The digressions seem to be motivated by pedagogic considerations.[134] The preacher, as the teacher, instructs his audience in the most elementary fashion, while raising the more advanced pupils to even greater heights. Appealing to everyday usage and to Biblical proof texts, Didymus has established the leitmotif of his exegesis. Ecclesiastes' deprecation of the world is only in comparison to the higher values. Indeed, Didymus' wide range of citations and allusion to "secular" authorities and everyday demonstrates to his pupils a respect and regard for the "visible" world.[135]

The language of Qohelet book is very figurative. This, obviously, induces to the allegorical interpretation. Starting from this figurativeness, Didymus mentions the different tips of interpretation of the text, but does not decide between them. Literal and spiritual interpretations go together.[136] At the end of explanation of single lemma Didymus turns to the questions of pupils. The aim of his exegesis is the help for spiritual idea content of the Scriptures.[137] Didymus generally devotes his individual comments in lectures to two interpretative issues: first, the clarification of difficulties that reader might encounter and, second, the disclosure of the interior meaning of the text. While the exegetical terminology is somewhat fluid, Didymus regards the formal task generally as the "literal" interpretation (*pros rheton* or *kat' historian*)[138] and designates the latter as the "spiritual" interpretation (*kat'*

[133] M. Hirshman, "The Greek Fathers and the Aggada on Ecclesiastes," 144 -145.
[134] Ibid., 146.
[135] Ibid., 144 -147.
[136] Generally, for the most representatives of Alexandrian school the literal sense, *historia* (ιστορια), was of little importance – because the meaning of the Bible was not expressed literally, but in enigmas and figures.
[137] Wolfgang A. Bienert, "*Allegoria" und "Anagoge"*, 28.
[138] Alexandrian exegetes often associated the literal meaning with Jewish exegetical tradition and argued that Jews understood only the letter of the Law, while Christians know its real spiritual meaning. However, this negative attitude to the literal sense did not mean whole disregard of biblical letter. For Alexandrian patristic exegetes each biblical letter had its own status originating from divine sources. Some interpreters paid attention to the etymology of Hebrew words. According, for example, to Jerome's testimony, Origen tried to clarify the original significance of Hebrew names. For further information about literal sense in patristic exegesis see C. Kannengiesser, "The Literal Meaning of Scripture," in

allegoren[139] or *kat' anagogen*[140]). The text itself, coauthored by the Holy Spirit, is vehicle that can convey the reader to either level of meaning.[141]

It is Didymus' opinion that the aim of the book of Qohelet is to set men on the right track of the knowledge of "heavens". Ecclesiastes considers "natural things", but the nature consists of "visible" and "invisible;" moreover, "visible" is temporary, but "invisible" is eternal.[142] This dualistic perception of reality is closely concerned with the interpretation of *hebel*-concept and events that denoted by it in Didymus' commentary. This question shall be analyzed in the next subchapter.

2.3. Gregory's of Nyssa Eight Homilies on Ecclesiastes

Gregory's of Nyssa[143] eight Homilies on Ecclesiastes were written in Greek.[144] They were most likely composed around 380 AD, shortly before the Council of Constantinople and during the prevalence of heresy in eastern Empire. The evidence from the text makes it clear that homilies were addressed to an ecclesial congregation.[145] The homilies represent Gregory's reflections and interpretation only of first three chapters of the book of Qohelet. Gregory

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Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: the Bible in Ancient Christianity, ed. C. Kannengiesser (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 1: 167-205

[139] Alexandrian exegetes followed Philo and used allegory as a method of interpretation that contrasted with literal sense of the text. In contrast to typology, allegorical interpretation does not establish historical relation between biblical persons and events and their spiritual prototype. However, Christian exegetes usually used the allegorical method in order to transfer biblical historical events of the past into future eschatological events. On allegory see R.P.C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event,* (London, 1959); Thomas Bohm, "Allegory and History," in *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: the Bible in Ancient Christianity*, 213-226.

[140] In patristic tradition *anagoge* means the uplifting from the literal to the spiritual sense in the interpreter's mind. Alexandrian exegetes usually applied the term *anagoge* in order to offer higher spiritual meaning of the biblical text. Alexandrian exegetes, most likely under neoplatonic influence, connected anagogical interpretation of the Bible with the spiritual perfection of Christians and the uplift of the soul to God. On anagoge see C. Kannengiesser, "Anagogy: Figurative Exegesis and the Beyond it," in *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 256-258; Wolfgang A. Bienert, "*Allegoria" und "Anagoge"*, 58-68.

[141] Richard A. Layton, *Didymus the Blind and his Circle in Late Antiquity: Virtue in Narrative in Biblical Scholarship* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 26-27.

[142] Wolfgang A. Bienert, "*Allegoria" und "Anagoge"*,135.

[143] For information about the studies on Gregory of Nyssa see M. Altenburger, and F. Mann, *Bibliographie zu Gregor von Nyssa: Editionen – Uberzetzungen – Literatur* (Leiden, New York, 1988).

[144] The critical editions of original text was published in Gregorius Nyssenus, *In Ecclesiasten, Patrologiae Graecae*, vol. XLIV, ed. J.P. Migne (Paris, 1863), 615-750; Gregorii Nysseni, *In Ecclesiastes homiliae,* in *Auxilio aliorum virorum doctorum edenda curavit Wernerus Jaeger*, ed. Paulus Alexander (Leiden, 1986), 5: 195-442. Cf. Italian translation: Gregorio di Nissa, *Omelie sull'Ecclesiaste,* transl. by Sandro Leanza (Rome: Citta nuova, 1990); English translation, Gregory of Nyssa. *Homilies on Ecclesiastes. An English Version with Supporting Studies. Proceeding of Seventh International Colloquim on Gregory of Nyssa,* ed. Stuart Georg Hall (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1993). The translators of Homilies conclude that it is not easy to translate Gregory because of the subtlety of both his Christian preaching and his sophisticated rhetoric.

[145] Stuart George Hall, "Introduction. Adjustment to the text of Gregory," in *Gregory of Nyssa. Homilies on Ecclesiastes An English Version with Supporting Studies*, 1.

interprets the text according to its spiritual meaning and not the earthly things of which the text speaks.[146] He also suggests that what is written in Ecclesiastes need not have happened literally. Gregory apparently was not interested in writing classical commentary. He was addressing a congregation in order to let know of the main goal of the book of Qohele: to take away human *νους* (i.e. "soul") from the earthly things and to lead it to God.

According to conclusion of translators and scholars Gregory's use of language sometimes is bizarre, but usually falls within normal classical Greek usage. Having analyzed Gregory's language and rhetoric, Marc Hirshman came to the conclusion that "the homilies on Ecclesiastes delight in rhetoric opulence, in a cultivation of the imagery of Ecclesiastes. Gregory has chosen to expound Ecclesiastes by expanding its rhetoric, by elaborating its images."[147] Gregory's rhetorical techniques consist of similes, metaphors, analogies, illustrative material. From the text of the homilies it is clear that Gregory had grammatical – rhetorical background of his exegesis. The teaching of rhetoric and grammar served as an instrument of the pagan interpretation of the text. L. Meridier, for example, discovering the influence of the rhetoric of second sophistic on Gregory, asserts that Gregory often falls captive to his own rhetoric, sacrificing content to form.[148] All rhetoric techniques of Gregory's exegesis mentioned above are present in homilies on Ecclesiastes. Gregory frequently interprets the text by using comparisons, contrasting, identification, illustrations, and synonymy. He often explores the meaning of words by considering their opposites, "The definition of things pursued becomes more exact when they are compared with their opposites" (355,1-3). Gregory also makes rich use of illustrations. He draws illustrations from the sun, the sea and the earth to describe human life (286,1 -289,18). Gregory has a large rhetorical warehouse of contemporary illustrations. He illustrates the teaching that he finds in the text from practice medicine, athletics, pearl diving, irrigation, farming, lawyers and military operations.[149] The interpretation of one biblical text by another passage from the Bible is

[146] While interpreting the biblical text Gregory accepted literal, allegorical, and spiritual meaning. However, in most cases Gregory used allegorical interpretation because of his evident adherence to Alexandrian allegorical tradition of exegesis. For Gregory each meaning of the text is allegorical because each word in the case of careful consideration is polysemantic. The literal meaning was understood by Gregory as support of allegorical exegesis. For allegorical-typological interpretation following terminology was used by Gregory: αναγωγη, τροπολογια, διάνοια, θεωρια, νους. Gregory with great devotion gave himself up to allegorical interpretation of Scripture following the methods of Alexandrian catechists, Apostle Paul, Philo of Alexandria. The exhaustive analyze of Gregory's allegorical exegesis one can find in Martin Nikolaus Espers's work *Allegorie und Analogie bei Gregor von Nyssa* (Bonn: Rudolf Habet Verlag CMBH, 1979).

[147] M. Hirshman, "The Greek Fathers and the Aggada on Ecclesiastes," 148.

[148] Quoted from M. Hirshman, Ibid., 151.

[149] More detailed about the illustrations in Gregory's homilies writes Everet Ferguson, "Some Aspect of Gregory of Nyssa's Interpretation of Scripture Exemplified in his Homilies on Ecclesiastes," in *Studia Patristica,* Vol XXVII (Peeters Publishers Press, 1993), 32-33.

also used in homilies, "these ideas cannot possibly become clear to us unless the passage has first been interpreted through the Scripture" (397, 19-20). Determining the sense of the text Gregory at first usually offers preliminary interpretation (προθεωρια), but then tries to fit the thoughts (νοηματα) exactly to the words (sounds of the words) (προσαμοσαι). Gregory suggests that in the case of combination of sense of text and verbal sense of words (λεξις) it is possible to examine does the commentator see the true sense of the text.[150] Therefore Gregory carefully studies the meanings of the words in ordinary language and also pays attention to an use of the language of the Holy Scripture. Gregory often proceeds in his interpretation by logical analysis. Gregory seeks for a logical explanation for why the text speaks as it does. He proposes that interpretation must be twofold, both theoretical and practical.[151] Another feature of Gregory's works is its high oratory. Taking into account this feature we can conclude that the homilies were preached in a church.

The trace of the antique rhetoric influence is found already in the prologue of the homilies on Ecclesiastes where Gregory determines the goal and the use of the book of Qohelet and by using the type of the antique prologue of a commentary. The question of the goal of the work had a big importance in the antique literature. For example, Henriette M. Meisner shows that there are many topoi in the first homily on Ecclesiastes that usually are considered in the antique commentaries of poet or philosopher.[152] The perception of Ecclesiastes as a preparation for a mystery of the faith determines the goal (σκοπος) of the work. In Gregory's opinion the goal of the book of Qohelet is "to raise the mind above sensation, to persuade it to abandon all that seems to be great and splendid in the world of existence, to catch a glimpse through the eyes of the soul of those things which are unattainable by sense-perception, and to conceive a desire for those things to which sense does not attain".[153] The goal of the book is connected with its use (χρησιμον). Gregory argues that the themes that are taught in the book of Qohelet are useful for ethic change of the life. "The teaching of the book looks exclusively to the conduct of the Church, and gives instruction in those things by which one would achieve the life of virtue".[154] Probably under stoic influence commented writings were interpreted in antique scholien and theoretical works according with question of the moral use. A poet was perceived as a teacher of his auditory. The pedagogical aspect of the book of Qohelet also goes through Gregory's

[150] Henriette M. Meisner, "Grammatik und Rhetorik in Gregors von Nyssa Exegese des Buches Prediger," 241-243.
[151] More detailed see Everet Ferguson, "Some Aspect of Gregory of Nyssa's Interpretation," 33.
[152] Henriette M. Meisner, "Grammatik und Rhetorik in Gregors von Nyssa Exegese des Buches Prediger," 224 -224.
[153] (280,2-5); *Gregory of Nyssa. Homilies on Ecclesiastes*, 34.
[154] 279,20-280,1.

homilies. H. M. Meisner concluded that the pedagogical terminology of the homilies must be seen in connection with Gregory's determination of the goal and the use of the work.[155] Anthony Meredith, who studied the first homily on Ecclesiastes, has shown that close connection between the love of unseen things (i.e. the goal) and the reformation of the life (i.e. the use) owes much to the Platonic tradition. Plato in his mystical treatises *Phaedrus, Phaedo, Symposium* regards the vision of beauty and ultimate reality as the goal to which the life of virtue is a means. Aristotel and Plotinus also place the life of the mind and mystical union as the ultimate goal of at least philosophic endeavour.[156] It is clear that Gregory puts new Christian sense in this platonic concept of virtue. The text of the book of Qohelet is interpreted in the light of the established goal.

Many Gregory's exegetical ideas in homilies on Ecclesiastes were influenced also by some Christian theologians. Sandro Leanza determined which sources have been used by Gregory.[157] Gregory derives the following from Origen: Solomon/Ecclesiast as type of Christ, with Ecclesiastes addressed to the *ecclesia*; 3 books of Solomon as a progressive sequence; "eyes in the head" interpreted in terms of the soul and of Christ; the principle of interpreting Scripture by Scripture[158]; various aspects of the exegesis of the antitheses in Hom. 6-8 identified through other writers in the Origenist exegetical tradition. When speaking about Gregory's influence on other authors, Leanza mentions that Olympiodoros and Gregory of Agrigentum have used Gregory's homilies.[159]

As has been mentioned, Gregory saw the primary goal of Ecclesiastes in using it as a vehicle to ascend from the worldly to the spiritual. Marc Hirshman suggested that for Gregory exegesis and commentary were brief preliminaries to this goal. To achieve this he chose to amplify the message and to enhance the image through his rhetoric prowess, giving exegesis a secondary role.[160]

Besides the primary goal Gregory in his interpretation issued also from other theological principles. E. Ferguson considered that the principles of the doctrine (theology, Christology, ecclesiology) and virtue (moral and spiritual benefit) were for Gregory specific methods of

[155] Henriette M. Meisner, "Grammatik und Rhetorik in Gregors von Nyssa Exegese des Buches Prediger," 232-233.
[156] Anthony Meredith, "Homily I," in *Gregory of Nyssa, Homilies on Ecclesiastes,* 146 -147.
[157] Sandro Leanza, "Gregorio e l'interpretazione antica," in *Gregory of Nyssa, Homilies on Ecclesiastes*, 358-359.
[158] Ronald E. Heine shows that Gregory however defers from Origen in that he usually makes no effort to collect all the passages where a terms appears in the Bible, but interprets his passage on the basis of one or only a few other Biblical texts. Ronald E. Heine, "Exegesis and Theology in Gregory of Nyssa's Fifth Homily on Ecclesiastes," in *Gregory of Nyssa, Homilies on Ecclesiastes,* 201.
[159] Sandro Leanza, *Gregorio e l'interpretazione antica,* 359.
[160] M. Hirshman, "The Greek Fathers and the Aggada on Ecclesiastes," 151.

exegesis.[161] One of the fundamental principles is that the interpretation of the Scripture must be consistent with Christian doctrine. For example the words of Qohelet "all is vanity" do not mean an indictment of creation (283, 18-21). Gregory is especially concerned to protect the nature of God. The interpretation must be worthy of God (395, 16-17). Gregory's adherence to the Christian doctrine in interpretation allows Gregory to conclude that it is Christ who speaks in the book of Qohelet, and the text speaks directly to Gregory's listeners. "Ecclesiastes speaks to us", Christians (299,5). Gregory moves smoothly back and forth from Christ speaking (298, 5-11) to Solomon speaking (306, 11-13). The Church is instructed through the reading of that is written in Qohelet by Solomon.

As it was pointed out, Gregory had determined also the use of the book of Qohelet. According to him, Qohelet was connected with moral life: "now the teaching of this book look exclusively to the conduct of church and gives instruction in those things by which one would achieve the life of virtue" (279, 20 - 280, 2). "The life of virtue" (280, 1) or "training in the virtue" (333,16) is one of the main themes of Gregory's homilies on Ecclesiastes. Everett Ferguson, who analyzed the text of the homilies, concludes that of the two parts of religious virtue, the knowledge of God and the right conduct, the Homilies on Ecclesiastes concentrate on the latter.[162] The life of virtue is a life directed toward God. Gregory understands God as the Good, the source and the goal of virtue. For Gregory the life of virtue is fully concerned with the person of Jesus Christ. "Every name and thought of virtue leads back to the Lord of virtues" (436, 17), who is himself "perfect virtue" (358, 9). Gregory understands the virtuous life as an imitation of the divine nature that has been revealed in Christ. In Gregory's theology the understanding of virtue is also based on concept of the freedom of the will. And this idea finds its place in Homilies on Ecclesiastes. "Free choice is wealth" (326, 17). Gregory argues that evil results from the abuse of Gods gift of freedom (301, 20 – 302, 8 etc.). Gregory's moral theology has various aspects. Everett Ferguson for example concludes from the text that for Gregory perfection in virtue is always to be making progress in virtue. "For it is not a fixed moment and an appointed time that it is good to seek the Lord, but never to cease from continual search" (401, 2 – 13).[163] According to Gregory's anthropology the life of virtue has its psychological bases. The human nature is twofold. God is the Creator and the source both of soul and body, but the "person trained in the divine mysteries has escaped from the flesh and glimpsed the higher

[161] Everet Ferguson, "Some Aspect of Gregory of Nyssa's Interpretation," 31.
[162] Everett Ferguson, "Some Aspect of Gregory of Nyssa's Moral Theology in the Homilies on Ecclesiastes," in *Gregory of Nyssa, Homilies on Ecclesiastes*, 319.
[163] Ibid., 324-325.

life" (284, 13 – 19). Solomon and at the same time Christ serve as examples of virtuous life. When speaking about the sense of virtuous life Gregory suggests that the love is truly the sum of virtue, being directed toward that which is truly Good, namely God.[164]

In his interpretation of concept of *hebel* Gregory frequently turns to the basic theological and ethical themes that were mentioned above. While interpreting Qohelet's words "all is hebel" (Qoh. 1:2) Gregory tries to revise the negative notion that the universe is "vanity of vanities." He understands that this position denigrates creation and the Creator. Therefore Gregory seeks to neutralize this problem by asserting the traditional distinction between the visible and the invisible. Each element has its own proper value and form of existence. The one is mortal and subject to death, while the other is immortal and impassible. One looks toward the present, the other extends to eternity. Gregory thinks that one ought not to look to this life of the sense, which compared with true life is unreal and insubstantial. However the knowledge of visible world might become a guide to the soul for knowledge of things unseen (283, 18 – 285, 12). If the soul recognizes the vanity and relativity of the visible world, human illusory activity and values it ascends to God and desires virtue. Therefore we can conclude that in his understanding of concept of *hebel* (vanity) Gregory includes established goal and the use of the book of Qohelet. For more information regarding the various aspects of Gregory's explanation of all occurrences of hebel in Qohelet, see the next chapter.

2.4. Jerome's commentary on Ecclesiastes

Jerome's commentary on Ecclesiastes is a highly important and significant work in the history of the development of biblical exegesis – first of all because it was the earliest Latin commentary based on the original text in Hebrew.[165] Being sure in the veracity of the Hebrew text, Jerome used all the manuscripts that were available to him. For his commentary Jerome also used his own translation, Septuagint, and second-century Greek translations, i.e. translations of Aquila, Simachus, and Theodocius.

Commentary is dated to about 389.[166] The reason for this is a brief reference in the introduction to the commentary where Jerome mentions that he started this work at Blaesilla's request five years ago in Rome, but broke it off because of her death. In the preface Jerome also

[164] More detailed about moral theology and the concept of virtue see in Everett Ferguson's article (Ibid., 319-336).
[165] Jay Braverman, *Jerome's Commentary on Daniel*: *A Study of Comparative Jewish and Christian Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible* (Washington: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1978), 28.
[166] Some scholars offer later time of composition, early fifth century (A.Vonach-Innsbruck, "Der Ton macht Musik," 41, 97).

informs that he read the book of Qohelet for Blaesilla in order to teach her to despise the wordly things of this world. Five years later, in Bethlehem, Jerome finished the commentary and addressed it to his disciples, Paula, Blaesilla and Eustochium.[167]

Jerome does not deny the canonicity of Ecclesiastes by pointing out to the fact that its author is the king Solomon. At the same time Jerome sees in the name of Ecclesiastes an allusion to Jesus Christ.[168] Jerome also explained his method: do not follow the earlier authorities, but do your own translation from Hebrew.[169] However, in his view, independence of translation does not mean independence of exegesis. The commentary reflects interpretations of Jerome's contemporaries and contains quotes from earlier exegetes. Sometimes Jerome mentions their names (Origen, Appolinarius, Gregory Thaumaturgus, Victorin from Peta, Lactanius); sometimes he does not reveal the identity of his fellow-commentators by saying "as another say" or "as another think".[170] Jerome borrowed from Origen the idea that Proverbs point to the childhood of Solomon, Qohelet to his maturity, whereas Song of Songs to his old age. These stages of life, therefore, are ethics, physics, and logic in philosophy.[171]

Jerome is guided by accepted text division. This is why his commentary interprets Qohelet verse by verse. While commenting the text Jerome often resorts to explanation of grammatical forms of the words if this can help to understand the meaning of the text.[172] In spite of the fact that his was the first Christian commentary based on the Hebrew text, Jerome perfectly understands the text and Hebrew words. For example, while trying to explain the meaning of the expression *raut ruah* (Qoh.1:14), Jerome argues that one must study philological aspects of expression in order to question the meaning. His method is the following: Jerome offers various interpretations when dividing them by the words "or" and "otherwise".[173] The exegetical approach of the commentary consists of two types: *interpretatio litteralis* and *interpretatio spiritualis*. Jerome considered that one must first understand the text literally and

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[167] J.D. Kelly, *Jerome. His Life, Writings and Controversies* (Massachusetts: Hendrikson publishers, 1998), 150; R. Kieffer, "Jerome: His Exegesis and Hermeneutics," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. The History of its Interpretation: From the Beginning to the Middle Ages (Until 1300), Part 1: Antiquity,* ed. M. Saebo (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 668, 677; D. Brown, *Vir Triniguis. Study in the Biblical Exegesis of Saint Jerome* (The Niederlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1992), 138.

[168] *Blazhennogo Ieronima Tolkovanie na knigu Ekkleziast,* in *Trudy Kievskoi dukhovnoi Akademii za 1880g.,* 2-3.

[169] G. Grützmacher, *Hieronymus. Eine Biographische Studie zur alten Kirchengeshichte. Sein Leben und Schriften von 385–400* (Scientia, Verlag Aaalen, 1969), 2:52.

[170] Jerome in his commentary side by side with Christian commentator mentioned also his Jewish teacher who advised him on Jewish exegesis. G. Gruetzmacher, *Hieronymus,* 54; S. Holm-Nielsen, "The Book of Ecclesisastes and the Interpretation of It in Jewish and Christian Theology," *Annual of Swedish Theological Institute* 10 (1976): 72; Mark Girshman, *Evreiskaia i khristianskaia interpretatsii Biblii*, 105.

[171] J.D.Kelly, *Jerome,*150.

[172] Andreas Vonach-Innsbruck, "Der Ton macht Musik," 42.

[173]Mark Girshman, *Evreiskaia i khristianskaia interpretatsii Biblii*, 114

only afterwards move to the level of the spiritual interpretation.[174] Nevertheless, he understood that it was difficult to link these two types of interpretation. Sometimes Jerome offers only literal interpretation and does not see the need to understand the text allegorically. It is important to know that Jerome read the Old Testament from Christian position, understood the text Christologically, and saw Christ in the text. Therefore Christological understanding of the text is spiritual interpretation while literal reading includes non-Christological and also non-Christian interpretations.[175] Most part of the commentary on Ecclesiastes consists of spiritual interpretation. For example, Jerome commented Qoh. 1:4 in the following way: the first generation points to the synagogue, while the second to the Church. Rising sun points to Christ and his virtue ascends over God-fearing Christians. Qohelet's words "here is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and *that* he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour" (2:24) Jerome also understands allegorically. The bread and the wine point to the body and the blood of Christ. Jerome agrees with Jewish opinion that the author of Qohelet is the king Solomon. Nevertheless, at the same time he associates the title *Ecclesiastes* with Christ. Jerome based this argument on the fact that Christ is *caput omnis ecclessiae* which comprise not only a Jewish congregation, but the whole multitude of nations. [176]

Jerome very often resorts to exegetical method to explain one expression or passage by quotations from the Scriptures quite irrespective of the context. This exegetical method was common for Christian and Jewish commentators. However, each tradition used it for a different purpose. This shall be demonstrated in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. To conclude, Jerome's commentary on Ecclesiastes is perhaps not so valuable for modern biblical exegesis. Nevertheless, for Christianity of Late Antiquity it was one of the best examples of contemporary biblical interpretations.

[174] Jerome was equally influenced by two great schools, those of Alexandria and Antioch. Jerome studied by two representatives of those schools, Apollinaris of Laodicea and Didymus of Alexandria. He borrowed exegetical methods of both traditions, trying to emphasize the aspects of each of them.
[175] Sveden Holm-Nielsen, "The Book of Ecclesisastes and the Interpretation of It in Jewish and Christian Theology,"67.
[176] Ibid., 68 -69, 73; J.D.Kelly, *Jerome*, 151-152.

III COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE INTERPRETATION OF *HEBEL*-CONCEPT IN PATRISTIC AND RABBINIC SOURCES[177]

3.1. Human activity and efforts are *hebel*

The theme of human efforts is frequently touched upon in the book of Qohelet. The question "What profit (*yitrôn*) hath a man of all his labour which he takes under the sun?" is raised already in the beginning of the book (1:3). Human efforts and activity are valued as *hebel* in the following verses: 1:14; 2:11, 2:17–23; 4:4, 7s.[178] In these verses Qohelet usually used the word *ʿāmāl* that means at once "heavy work" and "wealth, property".

Qoh. 1:14. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all *is* vanity and vexation of spirit.[179]

The meaning of this verse is directly connected to the previous verse (*And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith* (1:13)). In both verses Qohelet does not use the word *ʿāmāl* but expressions *kol ʾăšer naʿăsa, hamaʿăsîm šennaʿăsû*.[180] Those words refer only to this world and earth, and Qohelet consequently means here human life and its integral part – human activity and efforts.

Qoh. 2:11. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all *was* vanity and vexation of spirit, and *there was* no profit under the sun.

While describing his labours and achievements in the verses 2:4–10, Qohelet concludes that all is vanity (2:11). In this earthly reality human labours do not have permanent profit and therefore they are futile, absurd and illusory.[181]

Qoh. 2:17–23. Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun *is* grievous unto me: for all *is* vanity and vexation of spirit. Yea, I hated all my labour which I had

[177] All the direct quotations from Qohelet, which shall be analyzed in this chapter, will be distinguished from the main body of the text by additional spacing and numbers in bold.
[178] This division is found in E. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament,* 177; M. Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions,* 39.
[179] Biblical verses are quoted from New King James Version (1982).
[180] Verb *ʿasa* (Heb. "to work, to act, to make") occures in the book of Qohelet 43 times, while the noun *maʿase* (Heb. "work, action") 21 times.
[181] B. L. Berger, "Qohelet and the Exigencies of the Absurd," 145; M. Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 39.

taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise *man* or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have showed myself wise under the sun. This *is* also vanity. Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun. For there is a man whose labour *is* in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it *for* his portion. This also *is* vanity and a great evil. For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? For all his days *are* sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart takes not rest in the night. This is also vanity.

In the following fragment 2:17–23 *hebel* occurs three times and values one event. Here Qohelet does not value activity and efforts negatively; on the other hand, he negatively refers to the destiny of their achievements. Qohelet tries to understand why the wise man must leave his labours and achievements to the man who shall be after. Who knows whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? Man cannot control this incomprehensible and unjust situation, and therefore it is also *hebel* and *ra'ah rabbah*.

Qoh. 4:4. Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbor. This is also vanity and vexation of spirit.

In this verse Qohelet also touches upon the question of human labours and envy. Qohelet observes that human labours and efforts often result in envy. In this context *hebel* can denote both labours and the fact that the envy gives reasons for the work.[182] The word *qin'āh* (envy) means also rivalry. In the wisdom literature it is always the cause of self-destruction (cf. Prov 14:30). Qohelet views negatively the fact that the man works because of the envy.[183] The work motivated by the envy is absurd because it does not give joy to the man.[184]

Qoh. 4:7f. Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun. There is one alone, and there is not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother: yet is there no end of all his labour; neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither saith he, For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good? This is also vanity, yea, it is a sore travail.

[182] Ibid., 41; E. Good, *Irony in the Old Testamen*, 178.
[183] C.L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 179, 187.
[184] M. Fox, "The Meaning of *Hebel* for Qohelet," 418.

Events described in the verses 4:7f are also determined as *hebel* and *'inyan ra'*. The man works without a break and saves up the wealth, but it does not make him happy because he does not have heirs. Therefore Qohelet affirms that labour, its achievements and wealth have the sense only if the man has wise heirs. Without inheritance efforts and wealth are futile.[185]

3.1.1. Interpretation of Midrash Qohelet Rabbah

Qohelet Rabbah interprets only three of the fragments mentioned above, 1:14, 2:17 – 23, 4:7 – 8. Sometimes the Midrash offers interpretation which is close to the context of the biblical book. Nevertheless, normally Qohelet is more often used as a starting point for further rabbinic reflections.

Commenting the verse **1:14**[186] the Midrash uses three parables (*mashal*). In place of full introductory formulation of mashal (Heb. *mšl lmh hdbr dwmh l-*; translation: "The parable. Is it like something?"), all three parables use the brief form *l-* (like …).[187] The words of Qohelet are understood as warning. The first parable speaks about an old man sitting at the cross-roads and warning the passers-by about two paths before him. The Midrash asks: "Ought not people to be thankful to him for warning them?" Then Qohelet Rabbah goes on to the next parable that offers a direct commentary of the text. The Midrash asserts that the author of Qohelet is the king Solomon. Therefore, the words of the verse 1:14 are understood as warning of Solomon who sits by the gates of wisdom and warns Israel. All that is done under the sun is vanity and striving after wind, except repentance and good deeds.[188] In this interpretation the Midrash makes it clear that not all human activity and works are *hebel*. Pious life that includes good deeds and repentance are not depraved by vanity and futility. Here one can again see that Qohelet Rabbah denies general nature of *hebel* and refers its features only to direct events. After the second parable the Midrash smoothly goes on to the third parable and tells about an astrologer who was sitting at the entrance to the harbour and advised all passers-by by telling them that such-and-

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[185] E Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*,178; R. Gordis, *Koheleth*, 242.

[186] For Hebrew text of interpretation, see appendix 1.1. (cf. *Midrash Kohelet Rabbah*, in Institute for Computers in Jewish Life, and Davka Corporation. 1995. *The CD ROM Judaic classics library*. Chicago, IL: Institute for Computers in Jewish Life).

[187] For further information on mashal in Qohelet Rabbah, see J. Watchen, *Midrasch-Analyze. Strukturen im Midrasch Qohelet Rabba*, 264-272.

[188] Generally in Biblical as well as post-Biblical literature repentance (*teshubah*) is postulated as the indispensable condition on which the salvation and redemption of the people of Israel, as well as of every individual man, depend (Gen. 4:7; Lev. 4; 5; Deut. 4:30, 30:2; I Kings 8:33, 48; Hosea 24:2; Jer. 3:12, 31:18, 36:3; Ezek. 28:30-32; Isa. 54:22, 55:6-10; Joel 2:12; Jonah 2: 10). Rabbis argued that God made the repentance before the Creation (Pes. 54a). According to Shab. 32a repentance and works of charity are man's intercessors before God's throne. For more information, see Kaufmann Kohler, and Max Schlesinger, "Repentance," in *Jewish Encyclopedia (online edition:* www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=216&letter=R

such wares could be sold in such-and-such place. Completing this parable the Midrash also asks whether people should be thankful to him. Most probably, in the opinion of Rabbis this parable is an allusion to the warning of Solomon as the interpretation of this verse is concluded with brief version of previous Solomon's parable. While reading this fragment one could think that the parables only superficially expose the theme of Qohelet's words – because the persons mentioned in the parables are not connected with the sense of the text. However, it is no coincidence that Qohelet Rabbah brings in the text the name of Solomon and puts in his mouth more concrete interpretation. The Midrash gives it to understand that the author of the book himself and the text itself can comment the biblical words. This midrashic commentary is good example of how the form of parable can serve as an acceptable method of interpretation.

Among other Jewish sources only Targum Qohelet contains interpretation on the verse 1:14. The Midrash and Targum Qohelet often overlap; they were probably redacted about the same time and drew on similar sources. However in the case of this verse Targum Qohelet does not offer interpretation that is similar to the midrashic interpretation. Targum quotes biblical text and adds only some phrases which make the text more precise: "I saw all deeds *of people* which are done *in this world* under the sun, and behold all is vanity and breaking of the spirit".[189] Targum probably asserts here that the words of Qohelet are clear and does not see the necessity to comment the text in detail.

The verse **2:11** is interpreted only in Targum Qohelet. Targum adds one sentence to the text and at the same time offers a new meaning to the words of Qohelet: "And I looked at all my deeds which my hands had done and at the labour which I had laboured to do. And behold all is vanity and breaking of the spirit. And there is no advantage in them under the sun *in this world except that I have a complete reward for my good deeds in the world to come*".[190] One can understand these words in the following way: the man has no advantage from his labours in this world, but there is a hope for the reward in the world to come. It is a common rabbinic view about the reward for good deeds in the World to Come.[191] It is also interesting that the similar idea occurs also in patristic authors (this shall be seen in our analysis of the Christian sources).

[189] Quoted from *The Targum of Qohelet. Translation with Critical Introduction, Apparatus and Notes*, trans. and ed. Peter S. Knobel, 20.
[190] Ibid., 23.
[191] Rabbis elabourated the idea that the reward is connected with the World to Come. In this world a man gathers the scope of good or evil deeds and by doing this he predetermines a joy or trouble in the World to Come (e.g. Avot. 4:22; Er. 22a).

In the verse **2:17** Qohelet asserts that the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto him and therefore all is vanity and vexation of spirit. This assertion is introductory words for the reflection on human labour and its destiny that follows afterwards (2:18 – 23). Qohelet Rabbah does not comment this passage as a single theme, but offers interpretation on each verse except 2:19, 22.[192] Commenting the verse 2:17 the Midrash pays attention only to the words "so I hated life" and quotes three stories or rabbinic aggadot[193] that bear a relation to this theme. All three aggadot are concluded with special concluding formulation or "and he applied it to, to himself" that usually is used by rabbis. It is only the second story that begins with the specific introductory term "fact, event".[194]

The first story tells about a man (*Imikantron*[195]) who wrote to the Emperor Hadrian saying: "Behold you hate this people (Israel), and their God will exact punishment from you". The king ordered that this man should be beheaded and asked him "Why did you speak in this manner?" He replied "Because you free me from three evil experiences". "What are they?" he inquired. "My appetite desires to eat morning and evening but I have nothing to give it; and the same applies to my wife and children." Hadrian said, "Since you lead such unhappy life, abandon it (and die)", and the man applied the text to himself, *so I hated life.* It is clear that this story does not give a direct explanation of the biblical verse, but carries out another function, i.e. how to apply the text to an everyday situation. According to rabbinic views, the biblical text is connected to everyday life. On the other hand, according to rabbis, any life situation can be explained by biblical realities.

The sense of the second story is highly obscure. The words of Qohelet are applied to a certain glutton who worked all the days of the year on weekdays, yet on the Sabbath he had nothing to eat. What did he do? He once donned his working clothes, went to the top of the roof and threw himself down and died, applying to himself the text, *so I hated life.* In this aggada the Midrash also uses concluding formulation and probably in this story the rabbis are guided by similar method of applying the biblical text to the present. It is very likely that here the story

[192] For the Hebrew text of interpretations, see appendix 1.2. (cf. *Midrash Kohelet Rabbah, The CD ROM Judaic classics*).
[193] Qohelet Rabbah contains biblical and non-biblical rabbinical aggadot or tales. Usually aggadot are composed in the form of dialogue and its heroes are rabbis, their disciples, etc. For more details on structure of aggadot in Qohelet Rabbah, see J. Watchen, *Midrasch-Analyze,* 214-263.
[194] More detailed on aggadic introductory and concluding formulations, see ibid., 233-247.
[195] The name of a certain Jew otherwise unknown.

implies that greed and senseless labour does not satisfy the man and therefore his life is unhappy. One can suppose that this story has a didactic character.

The next story says that hatred of life can be connected with distress and disappointment of a pious man. The Midrash says that people came and told R. Hoshaia: "The judges whom you appointed drink wine publicly." R. Hoshaia, however, did not believe them. He once went out and found that his judges indeed were drinking wine publicly. He applied the text to himself, *so I hated life* and died peacefully. Topic of this story is based on the statement in Prov.31:4 *It is not for kings to drink wine*.

In the first two stories people hated life because of the lack of possibility to satisfy their appetite desires. Most probably the rabbis implicitly oppose this verse to others fragments of Qohelet which discuss the good of eating and drinking that God gives to man. For example Qoh.2:24 *There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God*, and Qoh.3:12 – 13 *I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life. And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God*. The possibility to eat, drink and enjoy life is the gift of God. However, if the man is devoid of this gift, his life is unhappy and hated. If our suggestion is right, one can see here how rabbinic method interprets one biblical text with another.

In the verses **2:18f** Qohelet confesses that he also hated his labours because he should leave it unto the man that shall be after him. Commenting this verse the Midrash resorts to the rabbinic aggadah. Interpretation is put into the mouth of rabbi Meir who was a skilful scriber and used to earn three *sela's* a week. He spent one *sela'* on food and drink, another on clothing, and the third on the support of Rabbinical scholars. His disciples asked him: "What are you doing to provide for your children?" He answered: "If they are righteous, then it will be as David said, *Yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread* (Ps.37:25). If they are not righteous, why should I leave my possessions to the enemies of the Omnipresent!" Therefore Solomon said, *And who knows whether he shall be a wise man or a fool?* Qohelet Rabba again uses the method to interpreter the words of Qohelet by others verses of the Bible. In this case one can see also the tendency to end the rabbinic aggada with biblical quotations, one of that is commentated verse.[196] The story about rabbi Meir does not perceive Qohelet's view negatively.

[196] More detailed on this method in Qohelet Rabbah, see J. Watchen, *Midrasch-Analyze*, 239-247.

While using the text of Psalms rabbi Meir concludes that righteous man has only righteous successors. And possessions of the righteous will not be inherited by a fool and a sinful man. Therefore, the Midrash does not agree with Qohelet, does not take his pessimistic view and offers the opposite interpretation.

Commenting the verse **2:20**, Qohelet Rabbah again slightly changes Qohelet's words and their sense. The Midrash adds the following sentence to this verse: "…but I reconsidered and said, 'Just as others toil for me, so I must toil for others'". One can assume that this conclusion serves as an answer to Qohelet's question: "For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun?" The sense of human labours is toiling for others. According to the Midrash, only the honest labours bear the fruits for the man. In connection with this conclusion the Midrash quotes funny, but instructive story.

The accursed Hadrian was once walking along the roads of Tiberias when he saw an old man standing and cutting down shrubs to set plants. He said to him, "Old man, old man, what is you age today?" He answered, "I am hundred". The king said to him, "You, hundred years old, and you stand cutting shrubs to set plants! Do you think you will eat of their fruit?" He replied, "If I am worthy, I shall eat, if not, just as my forefathers toiled for me, so I toil for my children." He told him, "By you life, if you are fortunate enough to eat of their fruit, let me know." In due course they produced figs, old man filled the basket with figs and went up and stood at the palace-gate. …And Hadrian ordered that old man's basket be emptied of figs and filled with *dinarii*. The wife of the neighbor of this old man was worthless woman and she advised her husband to fill his sack with figs and stand at front of the palace. He did so. But Hadrian ordered that whoever comes in and goes out the palace-gate will throw a fig in his face.

Interpreting the next verse Qohelet Rabbah uses widespread rabbinic method to interpret one biblical passage by another.

The explanation of Qohelet's words *For there is a man whose labour is with wisdom* is put into the mouth of rabbi Judah ben rabbi Simon. The Midrash attempts to see in these words allusion to God and therefore resorts to quotation of biblical verses that can prove this midrashic claim. Rabbi Judah praises the great power of imagination of the prophets who liken the creature to its Creator, and understands the man in this verse as God. As argument for this claim rabbi quotes two fragment of the Bible, Dan. 8:16 *And I heard a man's voice between the banks of Ulai*, Ezek. 1:26 *and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man*. Further the Midrash continues to interpret the phrases *with wisdom, and with knowledge*,

and with skill, quoting fragments from Proverbs and Psalms and applying Qohelet's words to God. *With wisdom* is compared with Prov. 3:19 *The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth*", about *with knowledge* it is written in Prov. 3:20 *By his knowledge the depths are broken up*. And on *with skill* rabbi Berekiah said on the name of rabbi Judah ben rabbi Simon: "Not with toil or with labour did the Holy One, blessed be He, created His universe, for it is written, *By the word of the Lord the heavens were made* (Ps. 33:6)". For interpretation of expression *Yet to a man that has not laboured therein shall he leave it for his portion* the Midrash continues to use the method of identification and refers these words to the generation of Enosh and the generation of the Flood. And the end of verse *This also is vanity and great evil* Qohelet Rabbah associates with fragment of Genesis (6:5ff)"*And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*", etc.

For the following verse (**2:23**) Qohelet Rabbah offers three interpretations using previous method of identification and to some extent continuing the theme of interpretation of the verse 2:21. The identification is usually introduced in the Midrash by the expression or "this alludes".

All three interpretations understand Qohelet's words *For all his days are pains* as allusion to the generation of the Flood, Sodom, and Egyptians who pained the Holy One, blessed be He, with their evil deeds. *And his occupation vexation*: because they vexed the Holy One, blessed be He, with the work of their hands. *Even in the night his heart takes no rest*: because His heart did not rest by reason of their transgressions. The Midrash concludes each interpretation with the phrase *He thought in his heart to bring punishment upon them by day and night* and proper quotations from the books of Genesis and Exodus. In case of this interpretation one can again see that Qohelet Rabbah does not agree with the primal meaning of Qohelet's message and offers a contrary interpretation. In the view of rabbis it is not the humanity that is a victim of misery and absurdity of life, but God is victim of humanity evil.

Examining midrashic interpretations of the verses 2:17 – 23 one can conclude that Qohelet Rabbah does not perceive them as a thematic unity and prefers to comment them separately, offering different aggadot or rabbinic stories. Generally speaking, the sense of these aggadot is contrary to the sense of Qohelet's words. Probably the Midrash deliberately offers this opposite interpretation and rejects Qohelet's pessimistic mood.

Now we shall turn to our second important source, Targum Qohelet. For verse 2:17 Targum adds some clarifying words and at once gives a new meaning: "And I hated *all evil* life, *for* evil work which was done *against the people* under the sun *in this world* distressed me". Thus, Targum explains why the life was hated by Qohelet. Interpretation of the next verse (2:18) has no parallel with Qohelet Rabbah. Targum also shares the opinion that the author of the Book of Qohelet is the king Solomon and thus adds some sentences from the fragment of 1 King 11:26 – 40: "And I hated all labour for which I laboured under the sun *in this world because* I will leave it *to Rehoboam my sun* who will come after me, *but Jeroboam the son of Nebat will come and take the ten tribes from his hand and passes half the kingdom*". One can see that this interpretation looks like completely midrashic, Targum also uses the widespread method of the Midrash to see in one biblical subject allusion to another. This interpretation is also connected with the abovementioned targumic reading of 1:2, where Solomon laments about those historical events. The following verse is also represented as Solomon's reflection on his heirs: "And who knows whether *the king will succeed me* and will rule over all my labour for I have laboured *in this world and everything which I kept in order* by my wisdom under the sun *in this world* will be a sage or fool and *I was dumbfounded in my mind and again said,* And this is vanity. I again despaired because of the labour for which I laboured *to acquire and which I have been wise to keep in order* under the sun *in this world.* For there is a man whose labour is with wisdom, understanding *and righteousness but he will die without a child* and a man who did not labour for it he will give it to be his portion. And this is vanity and great evil. For what profit does a man have in all his labour and in the breaking of his heart for which he labours under the sun *in this world?* For all his days are pain and *the strength of anger* is his way. Also at night *he* does not sleep *because of the imagining of* his mind. Also this is vanity."[197] In contrast to Qohelet, Rabbah Targum does not change the meaning of Qohelet's reflection, but puts it in Solomon's mouth in accordance with the tradition. Interesting feature of Targumic interpretation is its regular clarification expressed by words *in this world.* Probably targumist considered that it is necessary to show that the events of the book of Qohelet take place in this world under the sun.

Interpretation of the verse **4:4** of Qohelet is absent in the Midrash Qohelet Rabbah. Nevertheless, Targum contains interesting reading of Qohelet's words. "And I saw all the labour and every *good work which men do for it's the envy of him who is jealous of his fellow to do as*

[197] *The Targum of Qohelet*, 26.

he. The one who is jealous of him to do good according to his goodness the Memra of Heaven does good to him; but the one who is jealous of him to do evil according to his evil the Memra of Heaven will do evil to him. For this also is vanity *for the guilty* and *the breaking* of spirit."[198] A term *Memra* (the Word) is used in the Targum as a substitute for "the Lord" when an anthropomorphic expression is to be avoided. In the Targum, the Memra figures constantly as the manifestation of the divine power, or as God's messenger in place of God Himself.[199] Targum develops the theme of human labour and envy in its own way, introducing the idea of divine retribution. The jealous is met with approval if it is directed to the good deeds. The interpretation of Targum is probably based on the quotation from Babylonian Talmud (b.Yoma 39a) "if a man defiles himself slightly, (God) defiles him greatly. If a man sanctifies himself slightly, (God) sanctifies him greatly".

In spite of the fact that the verses **4:7 – 8** are thematically connected, Midrash Qohelet Rabbah comments them separately. [200]

Midrash's symbolic interpretation of the verse 4:7 does nor coincide with the context of the biblical text: "There I returned and saw vanity under sun: this is the mantle of the angel of death". The sense of this interpretation is obscure. Nevertheless, A. Cohen's commentaries on Qohelet Rabbah suggest that when persons die, the souls are conveyed from the earth under the abovementioned mantle, and death renders all the things of this world vain.[201] Thus Qohelet Rabbah in the symbolic way explains the cause of vanity of earthly events and things.

To the next verse (**Qoh. 4:8**) Qohelet Rabbah, on the contrary, offers five interpretations. For all five aggadot Qohelet Rabbah resorts to identification and typology. First interpretation is utterly symbolic, and Qohelet's words *There is one that is alone, and he has not a second* are associated with the Holy One. Midrash affirms that God has no partner in His universe (parallel with Deut. 6:4). He has no brother[202], whence should he have a son? But the Holy One, blessed be He, displayed love for Israel and called them "sons", as it is said, *Ye are the children of Lord your God* (Deut. 14:1). He likewise called them "brothers". In this fragment one can see how skillfully Qohelet Rabbah uses Qohelet's words for theological discussion and arguments. In

[198] *The Targum of Qohelet*, 31.
[199] More detailed see Kaufmann Kohler, *Memra* in http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=399&letter=M
[200] For the Hebrew text of interpretations, see appendix 1. 3. (cf. *Midrash Kohelet Rabbah, in The CD ROM Judaic classics library*).
[201] *Midrash Rabbah. Ecclesiastes*, trans. by A. Cohen, 117, ft. 3.
[202] A. Cohen explains that the word *ah* (brother) is understood in midrash in the sense of consort (from *ahah*, to join). *Midrash Rabbah. Ecclesiastes*, trans. A. Cohen, 117, note 4.

physical sense God does not have a son and brothers, and only in spiritual sense Israel is His son and brothers. God alone exists without any other deities besides Him. Perhaps, here we deal with hidden anti-Christian polemic. Midrash identifies further Qohelet's labours with the labours that God did during the six days of creation. However, according to the Midrash, creation is futile if the righteous does not endeavour to store up pious acts and good deeds before God. The world would then have been created to no avail. Perhaps the Midrash attempts by symbolic way to express the idea of the interrelationship between Creator and creation (synergy). The perfection of creation is completely connected with human behavior. Only good deeds of righteous can prevent the universe from global futility.

Biblical characters are the subjects of typology in the next two aggadot of Qohelet Rabbah. In the first interpretation Qohelet's experience is attributed to Abraham. Abraham has no equal; he was assiduous in performance of precepts and good deeds. And it is vanity that nobody acts like him. The second aggada offers the parallel with the tribe of Levi. Using quotation from Ex. 32:27 and Deut. 33:9, the Midrash explains its unique feature and functions because nobody acts like levits. Most probably that by the use of such typology and identification Qohelet Rabbah attempts to demonstrate the unity of the biblical text. It is not surprising that in the rabbinic imagination Qohelet's reflections can allude to Abraham, the tribe of Levi, and other heroes of biblical history.

The next midrashic interpretation is highly peculiar – largely because its identification is negative. Qohelet Rabbah asserts that the words *There is one that is alone* allude to the Evil Inclination ( ).[203] The man who follows Yezer Ha-ra and performs a transgression does not consider that his son and brother may suffer from his sins. Therefore, if the man cleaves to the way of Evil Inclination, his labours are evil deeds and vanity.

The last interpretation of the Midrash is closer to the meaning of the text of Qohelet. Aggada narrates a story about a certain Gebini ben Harson. His father was a man of immense wealth who left him an estate and a heap of denarii. Midrashic interpretation is put in the mouth of rabbi Levi who said in the name of rabbi Simeon ben Lakish: "On the day that Gebini ben Harson died, Belhazzar, the governor of Babylon, was born." It means that Belhazzar plundered all his wealth. Hence the wealth was vanity for its owner. In fact, this story has real historical

[203] Evil inclination or impulse, popularly identified with the lusts of the flesh. The idea is derived from Gen. 8. 21 ("the imagination of the heart of man is evil from his youth"). The Rabbis deduced that there are two Yeẓ arim in a man: the good (Yeẓ er Ṭ ob) and the evil (Ber. 61a). For example, according to the interpretation of Qohelet Rabbah of Qoh. 9:14, the Yeẓ er Ṭ ob comes with reflection, and at the age of bar miẓ wah or confirmation, because it is said to be thirteen years younger than the Yeẓ er Hara', which is an inborn impulse. For details see Frank Chamberlin Porter, *The Yeçer Hara: A Study in the Jewish Doctrine of Sin* (New York, 1901).

background: plunder of Jewish wealth and property was not uncommon in the Roman Empire. Therefore, the rabbis cautioned the Jewish community to be wary of an acquisitiveness and materialism.[204] This literal reading of Qohelet testifies to negative attitude of rabbis to the pursuit of wealth as life's goal.

Five abovementioned interpretations of Qoh.4:8 largely demonstrate the ability of rabbinic hermeneutic to see in one biblical verse different levels of the reading, from the symbolic to the literal. This gives us an opportunity to observe how successfully the Midrash unites and alternate various methods. In the first four aggadot Qohelet Rabbah uses different typologies, but concludes each of them with the phrase "is it not to cleave to his ways." Thus Qohelet Rabbah unites these interpretations under one theme.

In contrast to Qohelet Rabbah, Targum is more restrained in its interpretation of **Qoh.4:7f**: "I further observed *the vanity which is decreed to be in this world* under the sun. There is *a man* alone with no companion besides him. He has neither son nor brother *to inherit his property*, yet there is no end to all his labour. And his eye cannot be sated with riches. *But he does not say to himself, "Why then do* I labour and deprive myself of enjoyment? *I will stand up now and give charity from them and I will rejoice in this world with men and in the world to come with righteous".* This also is vanity and evil situation".[205] Here Qohelet raises a rhetoric question; Targum, in its turn, supplements the biblical text and gives its own answer to Qohelet's question. Targum denies Qohelet's pessimistic view and claims that the childless man can share the joy of his labours with other men and also in the world to come.

3.1.2. Interpretation of Didymus of Alexandria

Didymus touches upon the theme of futility of the human efforts commenting only the verses 2:11, 4:4 and 4:7f. The lack of the interpretation of other abovementioned Qohelet's verses can be explained by the loss of the material.

Didymus divides the verse **2:11** into three parts and offers a different interpretation to each of them.[206] A literal interpretation alternates with allegoric and spiritual; Didymus on the whole prefers to comment separate expressions of the verse that, in his opinion, can have independent sense. Thus, Didymus begins his interpretation paying attention to the words "my

[204] See also Gedaliah Alon, *The Jews in Their Land in the Talmudic Age* (Cambridge, Mass: HUP, 1984), 59-64.
[205] *The Targum of Qohelet*, 31.
[206] For Greek text of interpretation see appendix 1.4. (cf. Didymos der Blind, *Kommentar zum Ecclesiastes (Tyra-Papyrus)*, Teil I.1, ed. Gerhard Binder, and Leo Liesenborghs (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1979), 216-222).

hands" and then continues to explain why all works that human hands had wrought are futile. Commentator assumes that in some cases human labours (μόχθος) are connected with evil (μοχθηρόν) as the last is the action of the man. Human works and efforts are also futile because most of the people walk after the flesh and aspire after the things of the flesh Didymus bases this train of thought on the reflection of Apostle Paul on life in the Spirit in Rom 8:4f.[207] However, further Didymus changes his view on Qohelet's experience and suggests that a man who speaks about futility of human efforts and labours must be acquainted with all earthly things that he gives up.

The text of the interpretation of Qohelet's words "and, behold, all *was* vanity and vexation of spirit" is fragmentary at the beginning; nevertheless, it is still highly important because there Didymus speaks about the spirit. Obviously, this reflection is connected with the expression "vexation of spirit". Didymus says that "the spirit" can mean views, belief or the soul and again bases his opinion on quotation from the Holy Scripture. *They that erred in spirit shall come to understanding*, mentioned by Isaiah (29:24) are erred in views, but unmarried woman (1Cor 7:34) is holy in views and deeds. The spirit can also mean the soul, for example in Jam 2:26 *For as the body without the spirit is dead*.

The last part of Didymus' interpretation is devoted to Qohelet's *there was no profit under the sun* and is written in the form of the dialogue. Here one can see how Didymus lectured in his catechetical school and how he spoke with his students. In the beginning Didymus explains that a man, who tries to have the things that are over the sun and over the earth, has the profit in contrast with the man that strives for earthly things. After this introductory explanation follows the question from the audience about the profit that is over the sun. Unfortunately, Didymus' answer to this question has not survived. The next question of the students is about the profit that a man can have under the sun. In this case Didymus offers Christological explanation: the profit is coming in the Savior who gives the life and the profit. The last question from the audience focuses on the spiritual interpretation of Qohelet's words *I looked on all the works* and *there was no profit under the sun*. While explaining spiritual sense of these words, Didymus again quotes

[207] Paul usually uses the word "flesh" in ethical context. Flesh refers to to human nature as corrupted and weakened by sin. To be in the flesh, as the word is used here (8:8), is to be in the unregenerate state. To be (*ontes*, 8:5.) according to the flesh is to have the flesh as the regulating principle of one's life. To walk (*peripatousin*, 8:4) according to the flesh is to carry out in conduct those things dictated by the flesh. *Pneuma* (spirit) in this context does not mean "spirit" simply as an element in the constitution of man. The problem is to determine whether *pneuma* in this passage means the divine life-principle (the new nature communicated to the believer) or whether it should be understood to mean the Spirit of God.

the Holy Scriptures. A man is in the sun of righteousness, as it is written "*Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*" (Mt 13:43).

Didymus interpretation of **Qoh 4:4** is also full of lacunae, but his train of thought is still perceptible.[208] Didymus usually is highly attentive to separate expressions. In case of this fragment he intends to explain such concepts as "right work" and "jealousy." The right work is a virtue, knowledge, labour, striving for good things; it is often connected with jealousy that is affected with good things (for example Gal 4:18 *it is good to be zealous in a good thing always*). However the jealousy sometimes can turn into envy. For example, the creditor often evokes the envy of his debtors. Didymus further mentions some views of pagan philosophy on the question of the poverty-riches and the envy; however, this text is difficult to read because of lacunae.

Didymus offers a more detailed discussion on human efforts and their destiny in his commentaries on the verse **4:7s**.[209] As usual, Didymus begins with literal interpretation. The men, who does not have posterity, works and saves up wealth in vain – and his efforts are endless. Then, however, Didymus decides to apply allegorical method of interpretation and tries to find in the text the hint to the virtue.

While commenting the verse **4:8** Didymus further examines various types of inheritance. If a man does not have a son, his brother can be his heir. If a man has numerous heirs, he labours without end. Didymus is certain that literal sense of the text is clear and therefore goes to the spiritual meaning. If a man lives according to God's commandments, he has brothers and sons and other heirs in Christ – and loves his neighbours. While speaking about the endlessness of human labours, which is mentioned by Qohelet, Didymus decides to pay attention to the word "countless" and cites an example from the Holy Scripture. Didymus suggests that the word "countless" means in the Bible the thing that has no value. However, *the very hairs of your head are all numbered* (Mt 10:30; Luc 12:7) because *Whether therefore you eat, or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God* (1 Cor 10:31). Thus, by using this approach, Didymus at the same time interprets several biblical verses.

After this reflection Didymus turns to allegorical meaning of the labour and its profit. He suggests that the wealth of the sage also has no end in this world. As a conclusion, Didymus says

[208] For Greek text of interpretation see in appendix 1.5. (cf. Didymos der Blind, *Kommentar zum Ecclesiastes (Tyra-Papyrus)*, Teil II, ed. Michael Gronewald (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1977), 192-194).
[209] For Greek text of interpretation see appendix 1.6. (cf. Didymos, *Kommentar zum Ecclesiastes*, Teil II, 204-210).

that the man, who hopes to achieve knowledge of God and virtue, is satisfied. Therefore Didymus associates Qohelet's labours with striving for knowledge and virtue[210]. When the man achieves this, the eyes of his soul are satisfied.

When speaking about human efforts, Didymus does not involve all Qohelet's verses in his interpretation. Furthermore, the text of the commentary is sometimes incomplete. This factor makes it difficult to read and understand the commentary. In spite of this, the sense of Didymus' words is normally clear. He consistently starts from literal interpretation and moves to spiritual, while paying attention to separate words and phrases. The Bible is the main "instrument" of Didymus' method of interpretation. In each fragment Didymus quotes passages from the New Testament and tries to prove the fact that the sense of the cited verse can explain Qohelet's words. From today's standpoint, it is difficult to see the connection between the two texts. However, for the exegesis and theology of that time the sense was obvious.

3.1.3. Interpretation of Gregory of Nyssa

Eight homilies on Ecclesiastes of Gregory of Nyssa contain the interpretations of the verses **1:14, 2:11** and **2:17 – 23**. Commentary on the verse 1:14 is found in the second homily that contains the interpretation of the text of Qohelet 1:12 – 2:3. In his commentaries on the verse 1:14 Gregory connects its meaning to the previous verse.[211]

Gregory in detail discusses *evil distress that God gave to the sons of man* (1:13) and comes to the conclusion that evil has not been given to human nature by God. Gregory decides to explain the text resorting to the idea of human freedom. The capacity to choose between good and evil is by itself a good thing and a gift of God granted to human nature; through folly and sin it has become a force tipping the balance the opposite way and using God's gift in the service of evil.[212] It is clear that Gregory's interpretation is opposite to the literal meaning of Qohelet's text. Gregory's intention obviously was to develop his theological teaching of the free will and base it on the biblical text. Further Gregory goes to the interpretation of Qohelet's claim that all doings that have been done under the sun are futile. He suggests that it is not God that is the cause of those futile things, but the choice made by human impulse, i.e. spirit. Therefore God is not the cause of evil. While developing this thought, Gregory also explains Qoh 1:14 by Ps 13:2 – 3

[210] On virtue in Didymus' works, see Richard A. Layton, *Didymus the Blind and his Circle in Late Antiquity: Virtue in Narrative in Biblical Scholarship* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2004).
[211] For Greek text of interpretation see appendix 1.7. Greek text is quoted from S. Gregorius Nyssenus, *In Ecclesiasten, Patrologiae Graecae*, vol. XLIV, ed. J.P. Migne (Paris, 1863), 637-640.
[212] English quotation is based on Gregory of Nyssa, *Eight Homilies*, 49-53.

They have all turned aside, They have together become corrupt; There is none who does good, i.e. the cause of evil and free will of man. Evil and accordingly futility of human works result from the abuse of God's gift of freedom.

In the fourth homily Gregory interprets the verse **2:11**[213] as a part and conclusion of the passage 2:9 – 11. In fact, the verse 2:11 is the conclusion of Qohelet's reflection on his experience, labours, wealth and pleasure (2:1 – 11). Gregory examines these themes separately in the second (Qoh 2: 1 – 3), the third (Qoh 2:4 – 6) and the fourth homilies (Qoh 2:7 – 11).

While analyzing Qohelet's works and achievements, Gregory associates them with the pleasure – and pays attention chiefly to this aspect of Qohelet's experience. Referring to the Scripture (Gen 3:1), Gregory compares the pleasure with the snake that slips into the soul secretly and is then difficult to dislodge. Gregory uses widespread biblical symbol of the snake as evil. Therefore, it is evil and futile deed to store the wealth and pleasure; it is connected with the original sin. In Gregory's opinion, Qohelet's saying that all his labours are futile leads mankind to be favorably inclined to nothing here, but to see that futility is the only end of such things as wealth, ambition, rule over subjects, revelry and luxury is.

When discussing the futility of human efforts and striving after pleasure, Gregory adduces another symbol of vanity of worldly matters. Writing in water is senseless, transient and futile activity, because nothing remains of the shape of letters. In the same way, there remains no trace or remnant of happiness left to the pleasure-takers when the pleasant activity passes away. When concluding this interpretation and the fourth homily, Gregory gives an instruction to his Christian congregation to be beyond futile things and desires. Gregory restores to well-known theological and biblical symbols in order to make his sermons convincing and clear to his listeners.

Gregory thematically divides the passage **2:17 – 23** into three parts. [214] He connects the verse 2:17 to the interpretation of 2:16; then follows the fragment of 2:18f; the interpretation of 2:20 – 23 concludes the main theme of this passage. In general Gregory understands the passage 2:14c – 26 as debate between the fool and wise man. But understanding of the soul underlies the exposition of this passage.

[213] For Greek text of interpretation see appendix 1.8. (cf. *In Ecclesiasten,* 676-680).
[214] For Greek text of interpretation see in appendix 1.9. (cf. *In Ecclesiasten,* 689-693).

When speaking about the memory of the wise and the fool, Gregory answers on the Qohelet's question *And how dies the wise man? as the fool* and at the same time denies Qohelet's pessimistic view affirming that only wicked person has to die in body, while the good gains the immortality. Further Gregory continues to assert that the life of the wise endures through the memory, while oblivion embraces the fool. As the evidence of this assertion Gregory also quotes Ps 9:6 *their memorial is perished with them.*[215] The futility of Qohelet's labours (2:17) Gregory explains as disappointment in life, luxury and surfeit of wealth. "The one who fills himself full of the pursuit of luxury, and in the vomit of his confession feels loathing and disgust at the shame of what he has done, as at the taste of something noxious, cries that he hates that life".[216]

In his commentary on the verse 2:18f Gregory sees hidden meaning of Qohelet's words and asserts that the teacher does not slide passively down to the life of enjoyment, but came to it by reason of wisdom. Qohelet's romp through the life of enjoyment was for the sake of knowledge and was carefully monitored by the intellect. However, this experience is not for everyone; therefore Qohelet is not sure that his successor will not be controlled by futile things at which he toiled, not from passion, but prompted by wisdom. This interpretation demonstrates that in Gregory's view Qohelet was motivated in his experience by the high aim. Before discussing the futile things and labours it is necessary to analyze them by wisdom and knowledge.

Further interpreting the verses 2:20 – 23 Gregory continues his allegorical reading of the text and contrasts virtuous life and activity with wicked deeds and bodily efforts. For those who devote the soul to destruction, senseless pursuit of wealth, his life is painful. Gregory in his interpretation tries consequently to explain obvious meaning of Qohelet's words but between the lines one can find theological discussion on idea of the structure and faculties of the soul. In general, Gregory's view of the soul was Platonic, although he tried to express it in Biblical images and terminology. However, in this fragment and in the fifth homily in particular, Gregory does not explain or develop his doctrine of the soul. His interpretation of Qohelet's experience in the abovementioned verses drops a hint that the soul should always be under control of the rational faculty. When it is not so, the soul is exposed to chaos, destruction and futility. Therefore, in this case one can see how successfully Gregory integrates in the theme of futility of human labours the exposition of the doctrine of the soul.

[215] Probably here Gregory follows Origen's commentary on this Psalm. See also Ronald E. Heine, *Exegesis and Theology in Gregory of Nyssa's Fifth Homily on Ecclesiastes,* In Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on Ecclesiaste,* 208-209.
[216] Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on Ecclesiastes*, 94.

3.1.4. Interpretation of Jerome

In contrast with previous Christian commentaries, Jerome gives extendible interpretation of all the abovementioned verses. In his commentaries Jerome usually pays special attention to the meanings of the words of the biblical text. The interpretation of **Qoh. 1:14** is an example of Jerome's etymological analysis. He decides to speak about the meaning of the expression *raut ruah.*[217]

In the beginning Jerome tries to justify himself. He says that he is forced to speak about Jewish words, but the sense of the text is clear only from the meaning of the words. He enumerates various Greek translations of the word *raut* and concludes that in the case of this verse it means "a discord in human activity." All labours under the sun are futile – if the people do not agree each with other in definition of good and evil. Jerome quotes his Jewish teacher who said to him that *raut ruah* in this case means "languor and troubles or evil." Here, however, evil should not be understood in the sense of "opposite to good," but in the meaning of Mt 6:34 *Sufficient for the day is its own trouble*. All labours are futile and evil because human soul is suffering from various troubles. Here one can see how skillfully Jerome uses philological exegetical method to bring out the whole meaning of the verse on the basis of separate words and expressions. This fragment also can serve as explicit evidence of Jerome's exegetical contacts with Jewish commentators. Although Jerome considers that from Christian position it is not right to turn to the Jewish language so often, he at the same time realizes the importance of the Hebrew text.

Commenting the verse **2:11** Jerome offers brief Christological explanation.[218] Human labours are futile because of their contradiction. Jerome associates "the profit under the sun" with Christ, and His tabernacle is in the sun. Therefore, one who does not achieve the light, order and constancy of the sun of Christ, does not live and abound.

While analyzing the passage **2:17 – 23,** Jerome resorts both to literal and to allegorical interpretation.[219] In his commentary on the verse 2:17 Jerome juxtaposes the world under the sun (that lies in the evil) with the paradise. This world is exile and dungeon, while actions of this

[217] For Latin text of interpretation see appendix 1.10. Latin text is quoted from *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten, Patrologia Latina. 23,* ed. J.P. Migne (Paris, 1883), 1074.
[218] For Latin text see appendix 1.11. (cf. *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten,* 1082).
[219] For Latin text of interpretation see appendix 1.12. (cf. *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten,* 1083-1085).

world are vanity and great evil. Jerome further asserts that Qohelet's words in the verses 2:18f have two meanings. First, a man does not know whether his heir shall be wise or fool. Here Jerome makes a reference to the biblical story about Solomon and Rehoboam. The parallel with the abovementioned targumic interpretation is obvious. However, Jerome also suggests that in case of high contemplation one can affirm that Solomon speaks here about spiritual labours. A wise man labours both by day and by night, studying the Holy Scriptures and writing the books in order to preserve the memories about him to prosperity. Alas, his labours fall into hands of unwise who defame his efforts. According to Jerome, this text should be understood allegorically. Here the text does not speak about earthly wealth; Qohelet's wisdom cold not be directed to gathering earthly wealth. Wisdom and pursuit of wealth are mutually exclusive phenomena. Jerome continues this theme in the commentaries on the verses 2:20 – 23. Wisdom, knowledge and virtue despise earthly wealth and pleasure. Qohelet's experience is a good example of pious ways of the sage.

Jerome's interpretation of the verse **4:4** is brief and literal. [220] He asks whether it is not futile and worthless that people do not mourn over their disasters and sins, but envy those who are better.

Jerome unites verses **4:7** and **4:8** and offers three types of interpretation: literal, allegorical, and Christological.[221] It is vanity when a man stores up the wealth and does not know to whom he shall hand it down. According to allegorical interpretation, Jerome suggests that Qohelet speaks here about one who writes the books and hands them to unworthy readers. This interpretation is similar to previous interpretation of verses 2:18f where Jerome compares labours of wise man with his studying the Bible and writing the books. Further Jerome goes to Christological interpretation and reports that some commentators associate the words *There is one alone, and there is not a second* with the Saviour, because he came alone without any partner for salvation of this world. Nobody proved to be worthy to unite with Him in His work. There is no end to His labours because He bears our sins and diseases. Neither is His eye satisfied with riches because He desires our salvation and calls to repentance. Jerome's commentary demonstrates once again how successfully he can unite various levels of

[220] For Latin text of interpretation see appendix 1.13. (cf. *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten,* 1098).
[221] For Latin text of interpretation see appendix 1.14. (cf. *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten,* 1099-1110).

interpretation. He rehashes contemporary interpretations of commentators of other exegetical schools and attaches his own style of exposition.

3.1.5. Comparison

Now we can bring out the differences and similarities between rabbinic and patristic understanding of futility of human labours. At first I would like to sum up the main ideas concerning this problem. The main tendency of Qohelet Rabbah is application of the text of Qohelet to contemporary situation. Therefore, at first sight, interpretation of the Midrash is distant from the meaning of the commented fragment. The Midrash does not always share Qohelet's view. It suggests that not all the human activities and works are *hebel*. Good deeds and repentance are not depraved by vanity and futility. Qohelet Rabbah also expresses the idea that creation is futile if the righteous does not endeavour to store up pious acts and good deeds before God. The world would then have been created to no avail. The perfection of creation is completely connected with human behavior. Only good deeds of righteousness can prevent the universe from global futility. When discussing the theme of prosperity, the Midrash also provides the interpretation opposite to the opinion of Qohelet. The possessions of the righteous will not be inherited by fool and sinful. Moreover, the sense of human labours is toiling for other; only the honest labours bear the fruits for the man. Qohelet Rabbah also turns to the question of negative influence of evil human deeds on God. People vex the Holy One with the works of their hands. And therefore not the humanity is a victim of misery and absurdity of life, but God is victim of humanity evil.

In contrast to Qohelet Rabbah, Targum is intended to explain and clarify Qohelet's words. Thus Targum often makes it precise that Qohelet's experience takes place in this earthly world. "And there is no advantage in them under the sun in this world except that I have a complete reward for my good deeds in the world to come".

Didymus of Alexandria sees in his interpretation the case of futility of human works and efforts in the aspiration after the things of flesh. However, when speaking about Qohelet's experience, Didymus thinks that a wise man (if he teaches about futility of human efforts and labours) must be acquainted with all earthly things that he gives up. Therefore, Didymus associates Qohelet's labours with striving for the knowledge and virtue. When the man achieves it, his eyes (soul) are satisfied.

While interpreting Qohelet's reflection on futility of human labours, Gregory in general resorts to theological explanation. Thus he suggests that the cause of futile things is not God, but

the choice made by human impulse, i.e. spirit. Therefore God is not the cause of evil and vanity. Evil and futility of human works result from the abuse of God's gift of freedom. Gregory explains the futility of Qohelet's labours (2:17) as disappointment in life, luxury and surfeit of wealth. When speaking about Qohelet's experience, Gregory expresses the idea that is similar to the Didymus' thought mentioned above. Qohelet's romp through the life of enjoyment was for the sake of knowledge and was carefully monitored by the intellect. Qohelet, in Gregory's view, was motivated in his experience by the high aim. Before discussing futile things and labours, it is necessary to investigate them by wisdom and knowledge. However, this experience is not for everyone. Qohelet therefore is not sure that his successor will not be controlled by futile things at which he toiled, and by passion, but prompted by wisdom.

Like other fathers, Jerome explains Qohelet's view both literally and allegorically. All labours under the sun are futile if the people do not agree each with other in definition of good and evil. Human labours are futile because of their contradiction. However, allegoric interpretation affirms that Solomon speaks here about spiritual labours, because wisdom has nothing in common with pursuit of earthly wealth and values. Jerome also compares the labours of wise man with studying the Holy Scriptures. However, it often happens that spiritual labours and books of the wise fall into the hands of unwise who defame those efforts.

We can conclude our discussion regarding the similarities between the sources by saying that abovementioned patristic interpretations agree that Qohelet inquires the essence of things by wisdom and knowledge. The interpretation of the verse 2:11 by Didymus and Jerome is very similar: both connect the "profit under the sun" with Christ. For Didymus, it is a coming of the Savior who gives the life and the profit. Jerome associates "the profit" with Christ, and His tabernacle is in the sun.

What concerns the parallels between rabbinic and patristic sources, one can see that Jerome explicitly refers to his Jewish teacher. In spite of the fact that Jerome's reference to his Jewish teacher does not appear in the Midrash, here the exegetical Judeo-Christian encounters are evident. We also can try to recognize the similarity between rabbinic and Jerome's interpretations of Qohelet's words *There is one alone, and there is not a second*. Qohelet Rabbah associates "one alone" with the Holy One and affirms that God has no partner in His universe. Jerome suggests that, in accordance with spiritual meaning, "one alone" is the Savior – because the Saviour came alone, without any partner, to save this world. Thus, each religious tradition has a tendency to offer the association with its deity. Here one can speak not about encounter, but about common train of thought. Among the common ideas, we can rank rabbinic and

patristic suggestions that good deeds and virtue are not connected with futility of human labours. It is evident that Jewish and Christian interpretations of this theme are quite different in their methods and intention. Nevertheless, on the basis of the sources quoted above one can conclude that both traditions understand Qohelet's experience positively – and do not accept Qohelet's statement that all human labours are *hebel.*

In comparison to the Rabbis the Fathers are more ascetic. This is why they recognize futile aspect of human earthly labours. However, the aim of patristic interpretation, most probably, was the spiritualization of Qohelet's text. In Father's opinion Solomon's perfect wisdom does not simply speak about earthly things, but points out at the spiritual side of the experience of the book's author. Thus, according to patristic reinterpretation the achievement of true knowledge and wisdom was Qohelet's motivation of the process of examination of worldly human activity. A wise man can live according to the virtue and divine wisdom only by recognizing futility of earthly efforts. Thus, one can conclude that the aim of rabbinic reinterpretation was to add to Qohelet's experience the ethical aspect of human activity in this world. The Fathers, on the contrary, struggled against Qohelet's pessimism by spiritualizing the text and substituting worldly and vain human activity by spiritual labours of the wisdom. Therefore, by refuting utter futility of human efforts, both Rabbis and Fathers carried out the main task of their interpretation of Qohelet – to make the book acceptable for their respective religious teaching and tradition.

3.2. Wealth is *hebel*

Qohelet discusses the vanity of the wealth in verses 2:24 – 26, 5:9 – 11, 6:1 – 2, 6:7 – 9. He also touches upon this question while speaking about human activity in the earlier verses.

Qoh 2:24 – 26 There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God. For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I? For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

In the passage 2:24 – 26 Qohelet suggests that all good of man is from the hands of God. God gives good things like wisdom, knowledge and joy to the good man. To the sinner God

gives travail, to gather and to heap up that he may give to him that is good before God. In the wisdom literature the sinner (*hote*) means not only religious fault, but also bad worker and lazy fellow. In general, *hote* is a synonym of a fool.[222] Therefore, in this verse *hebel* does not value God's choice and action, but activity of a fool. The actions of a fool are futile, empty and senseless because they have no profit. Thus, Qohelet opposes these futile labours with true values, i.e. wisdom (*hokma*), knowledge (*da'at*), and joy (*simhah*). The actions of the sinner and his wealth, on the contrary, do not lead to the abovementioned values.

Qoh 5:9 -11 He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity. When goods increase, They increase who eat them; So what profit have the owners Except to see them with their eyes? The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, Whether he eats little or much; But the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep.

In verse 5:9 Qohelet again speaks about wealth. The meaning of this verse is connected to the following passage (5:9 – 11). *Hebel* in this context describes the following situation: who loves the wealth shall not be satisfied with it. The wealth itself is not negatively condemned here; here Qohelet speaks about the dissatisfaction of a greedy rich man.[223] Qohelet has doubts that the wealth is true good, and the rich man has no rest because of anxiety, abundance and greed. The wealth is used only in present and it does not have stability and profit in the future.[224] Therefore man's pursuit for wealth, his greed, surfeit and inability to be content with little is *hebel.*

Qoh 6:1 – 2 There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: A man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor, so that he lacks nothing for himself of all he desires; yet God does not give him power to eat of it, but a foreigner consumes it. This is vanity, and it is an evil affliction.

In the fragment 6:1f Qohelet does not affirm that wealth and pursuit for it is *hebel* and great evil. God has given to man riches and wealth and honor, but He does not give him power to eat of it, but a foreigner consumes it. God allows the wealth of man to be taken over by a

[222] R. Gordis, *Koheleth*, 227-228; C.L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 157.
[223] M. Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 41; C.L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 219.
[224] C.L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 220.

stranger. This may happen when the man has no children or when he loses his property through war, violence, or some other act of injustice. Qohelet tries to comprehend this situation, but cannot; this is why he describes it as *hebel.* Double use of the words *rā'āh, holi ra'* also shows that this situation is bad and incorrect. It also seems that Qohelet condemns here God's action.

Qoh 6:7 -9 All the labour of man is for his mouth, And yet the soul is not satisfied. For what more has the wise man than the fool? What does the poor man have, Who knows how to walk before the living? Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

In spite of obscure sense of the verses 6:7 – 9 *hebel* means here both human activity and its achievements. Qohelet considers that all the labour of man is for his mouth, but his soul is not satisfied. *Nefeš* is a center of appetite like stomach, and here it is an equivalent of desire and passion.[225] Therefore, the question is about dissatisfaction and his permanent pursuit for wealth. Opposing wisdom with foolishness, Qohelet concludes that "better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire."

3.2.1. Interpretation of Midrash Qohelet Rabbah

Qohelet Rabbah offers interpretations for each fragment where Qohelet speaks about futility of the wealth. In interpretation of **Qoh 2:24 – 26** the Midrash is as usually far from literal meaning of the text and comments each verse separately, without taking into account their unity of context[226].

Thus Qohelet Rabbah suggests allegorical interpretation of Qoh 2:24. According to the Midrash all references to eating and drinking in the book of Qohelet signify the Torah and good deeds. Affirming this interpretation, the Midrash adduces following evidence. All *the days of his life* alludes to the grave. Are there, then, food and drink in the grave which accompany a man to the grave? It must then mean the Torah and good deeds. Therefore, for Rabbis only the Torah and not earthly goods has true value in this world and in the World to Come.

In the next verse Qohelet Rabbah attributes Qohelet's words to the king Solomon. While offering Solomonic interpretation, the Midrash adduces funny story about Solomon's travel on a large eagle to Tadmor in the wilderness. By this tale the Midrash interprets 2Chron 8:4 *And he*

[225] R. Gordis, *Koheleth*, 260. Similar meaning of *nepeš* is also in Qoh 4:8; 6:2s.
[226] For Hebrew text of interpretations see appendix 2.1.

built Tadmor in the wilderness. Here one can see how rabbinic exegetes unite interpretation of different biblical verse by resorting to aggadic story. This aggadah of course has nothing to do with the biblical text. It is acceptable for aggadic literature to quote funny story in place of literal interpretation.

Qohelet Rabbah offers six interpretations on the next verse (**Qoh 2:26**). Each of these interpretations is based on the method of typology. The subjects of typology are positive and negative biblical characters. In the first interpretation the man that is good in sight of God is Abraham, but the sinner who gathers and heaps up refers to Nimrod. Further follows the types of Isaac / Abimelech; Jacob / Laban; Israel in Egypt / Canaanites; Hezekiah / Sennacherib; Mordechai / Haman. The Midrash bases each argument on the quotation from the books of Genesis, Numbers, Chronicles, and Ester.

Qohelet Rabbah does not intent to discuss only futility of wealth; it also offers allegoric interpretation which is far from the meaning of the text. When speaking about gathering of wealth, the Midrash simply attributes this action of a fool and sinful man to some negative biblical characters. In this interpretation one can again see midrashic approach to comment the Bible by the Bible itself.

In contrast to the Midrash, the interpretation of this passage in Targum Qohelet has explanatory nature. There is nothing worthwhile for a man except that he eat and drink and enjoy himself *before the people, to obey the commandments of the Lord and to walk in straight paths before Him so that He will do good to him* for his labour. For who *occupies himself with the words of Torah* and who *is the man who* has no fear of *great judgment day which will come* besides me? For to a man *whose deeds are straight* before *the Lord,* He gave (him) wisdom and knowledge *in this world* and joy *with the righteous in the world to come.* But to the guilty man he gave *an evil way* to gather *money* and to collect *much property to be taken from him* and given to a man who is pleasing before the Lord. This also is vanity *for the guilty* and breaking of the spirit.[227] Targum is intended to explain that it is good labour of man. In accordance with this, for the study of the Torah and obedience, God gives knowledge and wisdom. Gathering of money and property, on the contrary, is associated with evil, sin and futile activity.

Qohelet Rabbah does not see in the passage **5:9 – 11** the unity of meaning; it interprets each verse separately.[228] The Midrash unites the verse 5:9 with previous verse, but does not

[227] *The Targum of Qohelet*, 26-27.
[228] For Hebrew text of interpretation see appendix 2.2.

comment it. The Midrash offers extensive interpretation of 5:10 and, more precisely, it comments Qohelet's thought "when goods increase, they are increased that eat them". This interpretation is divided into two big parts. The first part contains some dialogues and rabbinic reflections.

In the first dialogue one can find a conversation between Menahem the cake-baker, rabbi Hananiah and rabbi Jonathan about the meaning of Deut 8:3. Was it a starvation diet that the Holy One, blessed be He, gave Israel in the manna? In rabbinic view, Qohelet's verse can explain the story about the manna, because Israelites were unable to have full enjoyment from the manna. The next dialogue between rabbi Meir and a Samaritan seeks to understand Qohelet's words as the symbol of the resurrection of the dead. The Samaritan asked rabbi Meir: "Do the dead live again, how will they come naked or clothed?" Rabbi Meir answered that not from the Scripture and Mishnah, but from everyday life we know that the dead live again, they come in public and clothed. Then the Samaritan enquired who supplies the dead with food. Rabbi Meir in his answer quotes Qohelet's verse and suggests that God will provide food for all those who are resurrected, no mater how great their numbers. Therefore the Midrash uses Qohelet's words in order to discuss the resurrection as the central doctrine of rabbinic Judaism. At the same time the Midrash does not blame the greedy rich that he remains dissatisfied, but understands Qohelet's reflection as a praise to God for his ability to provide for all the resurrected in the world to come. In case of this interpretation, one can again take notice of the midrashic tendency to turn the negative Qohelet's thoughts to positive and to add new meaning to the verse.

The second part of interpretation also touches upon the question of life and death. The midrash quotes rabbinic teaching saying that when the child is formed in its mother's womb, there are three partners concerned with it, viz., the Holy One, blessed be He, the father and the mother. The father and the mother provide the body, but God gives him ten things: spirit and soul, beauty of features, sight of the eyes, hearing of the ears, speech of the lips, the ability to raise the hand and to walk with the feet, wisdom and understanding, counsel, knowledge and strength. When the time to die comes, God takes His portion and leaves the portion contributed by the father and the mother before them. As illustration of this rabbinic idea, the Midrash quotes the parable of rabbi Judah the Prince about the king who possessed a vineyard which he handed to a tenant. The king is God, while the tenant is the father and the mother. The last interpretation of this verse concludes the theme with the discussion regarding removing and watching the body of the dead man on the Sabbath. The Midrash uses the story about David (Ps 39:5) and his son Solomon; at the same time the Midrash interprets Qoh 9:4 *For a living dog is better than a dead lion.* This interpretation

shows us once again how the Midrash can apply a biblical verse to a rabbinic idea, situation or doctrine.

The Midrash offers five interpretations on the verse **5:11**. In the first interpretation the rich is associated with Rabbi Judah ha-Nassi who attend to the people who brought to him their difficulties; his servant illustrates a labouring man whose sleep is sweet. Here the Midrash once again resorts to positive interpretation of Qohelet, associating the rich man with righteous rabbi. In the second interpretation the Midrash diverts from the meaning of the verse and tries to answer the question about the difference between the death of the young and the death of the old. Qohelet Rabbah offers illustration of the figs: it is the proper time for the figs to be gathered. Similarly, God knows when is the proper time for a righteous man to die.

The next story is a logical sequel illustration to the previous thought. Rabbi Simeon delivered oration over deceased Hiyya b. R. Adda. He told that God knew his deeds; this is why God has removed the deceased. The story that follows after this is connected with the previous one; it tells about the funeral oration of rabbi Ila over rabbi Simon ben Zebid. The last interpretation has an analogical theme. When rabbi Bun b. rabbi Hiyya died, rabbi Zera went and delivered a funeral oration over him on the present verse, *Sweet is the sleep of a labouring man.* He said that rabbi Bun b. rabbi Hiyya had learned in twenty-eight years more Torah than an eminent scholar could learn in a hundred years. Rabbi Johanan said: whoever has laboured in the Torah in this world is not allowed to sleep in the Hereafter but is taken in to the Academy of Shem and Eber, and of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses and Aaron. There is a common tendency in the abovementioned interpretations to see in a symbol of the death of the righteous in the sleep of the labouring man. Therefore, the Midrash at the same time uses allegorical method and applies the text to a current rabbinic theme.

Targum Qohelet offers an interpretation that has a sujet parallel with that of the Midrash Qohelet Rabbah. "*A merchant* who loves *to acquire* silver, *and business men,* will not be satisfied *to collect* silver and he who loves *to gather money will have no gain in the world to come if he does not do from it charity because he does* not deserve *the reward of the produce* to eat. Also this is vanity. When goods are many *in the world*, many also are the people who consume it, *what benefit is there for its owner who collected it, if he does not do charity from it so he will see its reward in the world to come with its own eyes.* Sweet is the sleep of the man who works *for the Master of the World with a whole heart; he has rest in his tomb whether he will live few years or many years; after he has served the Master of the World in this world, he will inherit the reward of*

the deeds of his hands in the world to come. A man who is rich *in wisdom has the wisdom of the Torah of the Lord. Just as he occupied himself with it in this world and struggled with instruction, so it will rest with him in his tomb and* not leave him alone, *as a wife does not let her husband* sleep *alone.*"[229]

Like in another fragments, in this case Targum also emphasizes the idea that human activity in this world has a great influence on the destiny in the world to come. Targumic interpretation explains that gathering of money, silver and wealth is vain labour. Money is of value only when it leads to the world to come by being used for charity. Similarly to the Midrash, Targum also associates the sleep of the labouring man with death, but his labour is works for God or study of the Torah of the Lord. Finally, by contradicting to Qohelet's text, Targum associates the wealth with wisdom of the Torah of the Lord. If a man follows the way of wisdom in this world, it will not leave him in the world to come. This interpretation is similar to the midrashic idea that he who studied the Torah in this world, is taken after death to the Academy of Shem.[230] Thus he may continue his Torah study after death.

Qohelet Rabbah uses the passage **Qoh. 6:1 – 2** to develop its rabbinic views; this is why midrashic interpretation of the passage is rather far from the original meaning of the text.[231] When commenting the verse 6:1, the Midrash assumes that the words *There is an evil which I have seen under the sun* refers to the rabbinic accusation of the devices of cheats (e.g. one who adulterates wine with water, honey with juice of the wild strawberry, etc.). The rabbis expose the frauds and do not fear that other might learn to practice them. The teacher's duty is to advocate what is right irrespective of the consequences. This interpretation is an example of midrashic attempt to associate Qohelet and his words with rabbis and their action and views.

Qohelet Rabbah also offers a symbolic interpretation of the verse **6:2**. Using the name of rabbi Levi, the Midrash suggests that God's gifts, which are mentioned in the verse, are in fact symbols. Thus, riches denote the master of the Scripture, wealth – the master of Mishnah, and honour – the master of Tosefta. *So that he lacks nothing for himself of all he desires* alludes to the great collection of Mishnah of rabbi Akiba, rabbi Hiyya, rabbi Hoshaya, and Bar Kappara. *Yet God does not give him power to eat of it* means that it is forbidden to decide questions of law from them. *But a foreigner consumes it*; a foreigner here means "the master of the Talmud." The

[229] *The Targum of Qohelet*, 34.
[230] I.e. Academy of the Lord.
[231] For Hebrew text of interpretation see appendix 2.3.

Midrash continues its critique of the Talmud and quotes the words of rabbi Ishmael who explains previous opinion by commenting Prov 28:11, *The rich man is wise in his own eyes*. Here rabbi Ishmael refers to the master of the Talmud, while the phrase *but the poor that has understanding searches him out* refers to the master of Aggada. This conclusion of course does not mean a negation of the halakhic tradition, but that the subject of Aggada is less obscure than the Talmud and thus less intelligent can follow it.[232]

In the biblical text Qohelet does not understand why God does not give a man a power to enjoy his wealth. Targum feels this contradiction – and seeks to understand why this situation is *hebel*. The sins of a man prevent him to use and enjoy his wealth and honor. "There is an evil that I have seen *in this world* under the sun and a great one it is for men. A man to whom the Lord has given *by providence* wealth and honor and property and he lacks nothing for himself of all that he desires. *But because of his sin* the Lord does not give him the power to enjoy it *and he will die childless and his relative does not care to inherit for himself, then his wife will be married to a stranger and he will inherit it and* consume it. *His sin caused all this for him because he did not do anything good from it, and his wealth turned into* vanity for him and a grievous ill."[233]

Qohelet's passage **6:7 – 9** is devoted to the theme of the vanity of the wealth. Qohelet Rabbah also interprets it in accordance with its exegetical interests. Each verse is commented separately.[234] Qohelet's thought that *all the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the soul is not satisfied* inspires the Midrash to develop the question of the soul. Qohelet Rabbah inquires how the soul passes out of the body at the time of death. Rabbi Johanan suggested that it departs like rushing waters from channel, rabbi Hanina said: like swirling waters from a channel, but rabbi Samuel ben Rabbi said: like a moist and inverted thorn out of the throat. It means that according to rabbinic views, the soul does not depart smoothly but with violence. The Midrash uses the allegorical interpretation and by the method of identification associates the soul with king's daughter who was married to the villager. Although he brings her everything in the world, it is not esteemed by her at all. So is it with soul: though you bring it all the luxuries in the world, they are nothing to it. Why? Because the soul is of heavenly origin. Concluding the sequence of the ideas in the words of rabbi Joshua of Siknin, the Midrash suggests that the word *nefesh* occurs six times (in

[232] See also Cohen's comment on this interpretation in *Midrash Rabbah. Ecclesiastes*, trans. A. Cohen, 158-159.
[233] *The Targum of Qohelet*, 36.
[234] For Hebrew text of interpretation see appendix 2.4.

Leviticus 1) corresponding to the six days of Creation. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to the soul "All that I have made during the six days of Creation I made for you sake, but you rob and sin and act with violence". Thus, on the example of one interpretation, the Midrash examines several aspects of the soul according to the rabbinic tradition. The human soul is of heavenly origin, but at the same time it is sinful.

When interpreting the verse 6:8, Qohelet Rabbah pays attention to the words *What does the poor man have* and offers three readings. So, what can the poor man do? First, let him go to somebody greater than himself in the Torah, who will explain its learning to him. The second question touches upon the social situation. How can a man, who is poor in property, go to a rich man? Let him engage in commerce. The third advice is to let him learn a handicraft, and Holy One, blessed be He, will support him so that he can live. Thus, Qohelet's words are only a material for the rabbinic discussion about the social status and business transactions.

The verse 6:9 *Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire* Qohelet Rabbah associates with the process of studying Mishah. Better is he who can explain his teaching clearly than he who mechanically goes on with his studies. Proceeding from this interpretation one can suppose that the Midrash attributes Qohelet's conclusion *this is also vanity* only to the last verse and not to the whole passage. Usuriously studying of tradition is futile action. Therefore, in the commentaries to this fragment, the Midrash does not associate *hebel* with wealth.

Targumic additions to the Qohelet's text are of ethical and theological nature. "*As for* all the labour of man, for the sake of *the food of* his mouth *he labours and by the Memra*[235] *of the mouth of the Lord he is fed* and also the soul *of man* is not satisfied *with food and drink.* For what advantage does the wise man have *in this world* over the fool *on account of the evil generation by whom he is not accepted? And* what *does that* poor man have *to do but to occupy himself with the Torah of the Lord so that* he will know *how* to walk *in the presence of the righteous in the Garden of Eden?* It is better *for man to rejoice over what he has and to do charity and* to see *a good reward for his deeds on the great judgment day* than that he go *to that world in suffering of the* soul, *but* this vanity and breaking of the spirit *for a wicked man.*"[236] When speaking about the Word of the Lord by which a man is fed, Targum obviously is influenced by Deut. 8:3 "man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every *word* that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord". Targum gives positive reply to Qohelet's question. The advantage of wise and poor man

[235] On the Memra see above mentioned interpretation of Targum on Qoh. 4:4.
[236] *The Targum of Qohelet*, 36-37.

is in his good deeds, study of the Torah and charity. Such pious behavior of wise is, on the contrary, vanity for a wicked man. Thus, while offering this interpretation, Targum provides a new reading of Qohelet's reflection.

3.2.2. Interpretation of Didymus of Alexandria

In the school lectures of Didymus one can only find interpretations of the verse 5:9 – 11 and 6:1f. Both interpretations of the vanity of the wealth are very extensive and contain different exegetical approaches. Didymus divides fragments **5: 9 – 11** into several parts and comments each verse separately.[237] He usually pays a considerable attention to the meaning of the words and expressions of the verse.

Didymus begins his commetaries on the verse 5:9 with literal interpretation. Chrysophilist shall not be satisfied with his wealth because his desire increases with his money. However, Didymus does not stop at this simple explanation and continues with the allegorical interpretation. While quoting the Psalm 11:7, he associates the word of the Lord with the silver tried in the furnace of earth. He, who loves it, shall be satisfied with it and shall meet the truth face to face (1Cor. 13:12). Continuing this theme, Didymus speaks about the spiritual thirst. The one who has the source of Christ in himself will not feel thirst again (John 4:13f). However, while getting the truth and knowledge, he always shall thirst after them and shall be satisfied.

Further Didymus pays attention to the increase of abundance. He mentions the negative aspect of the word "abundance" associating it with the works of the flesh. If we jealously give us to our flesh, then we get fleshly wishes and intentions. He who sows to his flesh, will reap the fruit of the corruption. Didymus generally based these reflections on the epistles of Apostle Paul (Gal. 5:19 – 21; 6:8; 1Cor. 9:27). Ddymus also affirms that Qohelet's words indicate not only the works of flesh, but also intellectual activity. In the discussion about the fruit of righteous he quotes Hos. 10:13 and Ps. 111:9 and opposes righteous that endures forever and the fruits of heretical teaching. The last is not true, but seeming and its fruits are vain in spite of their shine.

Interpreting the verse 5:10, Didymus begins with explanation of the words "the goods that increase" and resorts to Greek term *adiaphora* (αδιάφορα "indifferent things").[238] He associates the goods with desire and suggests that there are three good *adiaphora* that are

[237] For Greek text of interpretation see appendix 2.5. (cf. Didymos der Blind, *Kommentar zum Ecclesiastes (Tyra-Papyrus)*, Teil III, ed. Johannes Kramer (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1970), 6-22).

[238] *Adiaphora* was a concept used in Greek philosophy to indicate things which were outside of moral law – that is, actions which are neither morally mandated nor morally forbidden. In the case of ethics and morals those things have no sense. In Christianity it refers to matters not regarded as essential to faith, but nevertheless as permissible for Christians or allowed in church.

connected with the soul, body and appearance. The good of the soul is not a cause of the desire. Fleshly and outward goods, on the contrary, stimulate the desire and therefore they are not real and effective, but seeming. Didymus' interpretation of *adiaphora* remains somewhat unclear. Normally, in Greek thought *adiaphora* is connected only with fleshly and outward goods – and not with virtue of the soul. Then Didymus comes to the conclusion what is real good. The sin is not connected with good, but with health, strength and outward. For example, we sin with health and therefore the health is not real good. Having used this syllogism, Didymus suggests that he brings out the problem of interpretation.

When discussing he allegorical meaning of the words "to see *them* with their eyes," Didymus explains that this phrase means "lighted eyes of the soul." Obviously "the eyes of the soul" is a platonic metaphor (Plat. resp. VII5198) that occurs in the works of Clements and Origen.[239] To prove this statement Didymus quotes the words of apostle *the eyes of the heart* (Eph. 1:18) and the Psalms (122:1) *Unto You I lift up my eyes, O You who dwell in the heavens.*

For the last verse **5:11** Didymus first offers literal – and then more extensive allegorical interpretation. The one who is resting carefree and does not think about a guarding of his wealth, he has pleasant sleep.

Didymus understands the labouring man as a body that is the slave of the soul. The body itself can sleep; however, when the soul of a man is devoted to the false Gnosis, he cannot find a rest. Only the one who has true Gnosis can sleep because he is a slave of God. In the following discussion Didymus analyzes the question of a sin of the soul. The sin is a death for the soul; therefore, deliverance from the sins means deliverance from the death or resurrection. Resurrection of the body is an absolution from the sins. Didymus further develops the theme of the superiority of the soul over the body. The body is worthless and vain in comparison to the soul and invisible, and the highest things. Therefore vanity does not conquer the soul.

In the final part of the interpretation Didymus mentions another aspect of spiritual slavery. Quoting Rom. 8:14s Didymus speaks about the spirit of bondage and a fear of justice and punishment. The idea of this interpretation is that the fear of punishment cannot give reason for moral activity, but only free will and decision help man to choose between the good and evil, and become a son of God.

[239] For example in 1Clem.19,3; 36,2; 59,3; and Orig. Cels.7,39.

In his commentaries on the verses **Qoh. 6:1 – 2** Didymus pays considerable attention to the words and expressions, and offers both literal and allegorical interpretations.[240] When discussing uneven distribution of the riches and wealth, Didymus decides to touch upon the question of the right use of wealth. The use of the wealth is depended on obvious intellectual and spiritual differences between people. There is a difference even between unreasonable animals; therefore the difference among people is greater because they have similar things in different manner. If a man thinks that he can surpass other by the wealth, then he is in great evil. However, if he thinks rightly and makes right use of his riches, then he surpasses other people in his good deeds. A man receives only moral merit when he uses his wealth and fame rightly. Majority of people are rich and famous in the wisdom of this world (1Cor.2:6). They do not use their wealth, fame, intellect in right way and lapse into sin. In contrast to mediocre man, the wise uses his "wealth" in another way. If he has fame, then he does not think much of himself, but the glory decorates him. Didymus mentions Joseph as an example of wisdom and virtue. According to Didymus' logic this verse can be explained by the idea of the abovementioned *adiaphora*. A man can use the riches and wealth both in good and evil purposes. Therefore these things can be good and bad, right and false depending on the use. Didymus continues speaking about neutral attitude of wise man to the wealth and fame. He is beyond the power of the fate and necessity; he does not see the visible world, but contemplates the invisible. The wealth does not raise him, but the poverty does not put him down. The wise does not believe that the great evil can defeat him if he is infamous. Therefore, for the wise the wealth is neither good nor evil. It is possible that this interpretation is based on the idea of *ataraxia*[241] in Greek philosophy.

At audience's request Didymus mentions some allegorical interpretations. There is a man who has riches and glory and he thinks that his soul is sufficient; he uses spiritual wealth and glory. However, he does not have an opportunity to use it. One can also find a man who is "rich" in allegorical sense; such people do not have profit from their wealth. Nobody recognizes them, nobody respect them. We also know people who understand all, who properly reason and discuss, but they are unpopular.

In Didymus' opinion God does not give a man power to eat of his wealth because he incorrectly follows his desire to use the goods of the wealth. As illustration of this interpretation

[240] For Greek text of interpretation see appendix 2.6. (cf. Didymos der Blind, *Kommentar zum Ecclesiastes (Tyra-Papyrus)*, Teil III, 48-56).

[241] Greek *ataraxia* – lack of nervousness, imperturbability, mental rest, serenity as highest goal. One can achieve *ataraxia* getting rid of fear of gods, death, other world, and anxiety. *Ataraxia* presupposes limitation of needs, moderate enjoyment, deviation from social and state business, and freedom from prejudices. In *ataraxia* the intellect rules over the passions. The sage who achieves inner freedom is the highest ideal of the life.

Didymus mentions the parable about rich and poor Lazarus (Luc.16:19 - 31). The rich had wealth and property, but after death he lost everything and was sent to hell.

According to literal meaning illness or other circumstances can obstruct enjoyment of wealth. The words "a foreigner consumes it" can mean that the wealth is stolen by thief or confiscated by the order of the king. According to spiritual interpretation it means that some people use studies of other authors in spite of the fact that their opinions are not identical with opinions of these authors. For example, some people work on wise books while other use them, teach them, and win fame even if they can refute these books. It is vanity not to be a master of what another possesses and it is likewise vanity not to enjoy it.

3.2.3. Interpretation of Gregory of Nyssa.

Eight homilies of Gregory of Nyssa contain the commentary on the first three chapters of the book of Qohelet. It is only the interpretation of the verses 2:24 – 26 that deals with futility of the wealth. Interpretation of these verses is allegorical and full of theological and ethical ideas.[242] The words of Qohelet about food and drink induce Gregory to discus the true spiritual meaning of God-given food. Gregory reports that some people interpret these verses as the advocacy of gluttony. Food and drink are of course God-given, but Qohelet speaks here about another sort of food. Gregory explains that "to man – not the bullock-shaped man who has got a gullet instead of a faculty of reason, but the man who is good and lives in the image of the one Good – God did not obtain this food, which the bestial nature craves, but he has given him instead of food, wisdom and knowledge and joy".[243] If one turns to the comparison with rabbinic literature, one can assume that this interpretation of Qohelet's words to a certain extent is similar to midrashic understanding of eating and drinking as good deeds and study of the Torah.

Gregory continues discussion regarding the terms of food and bases his arguments on citation of Mt. 4:4 and Rom. 14:17. In exposition of Mt. 4:4 (*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God*) Gregory uses metaphors and lists the virtues of the food for the sublime life: prudence is food, wisdom is bread, justice is sauce, freedom from passion is drink.[244] Continuing the theme of true food Gregory offers free citation of Rom. 14:17 "as we had learn from the Apostle, that *the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but justice*, and freedom from passion (απαθεια) and blessedness (μακαριοτης)". Gregory

[242] For Greek text of interpretation see appendix 2.7. (cf. *In Ecclesiastes*, 693-695).
[243] Gregory of Nyssa. *Homilies on Ecclesiastes*, 97.
[244] More extensive about this fragment and its connection with Origen writes Ronald E. Heine, *Exegesis and Theology in Gregory of Nyssa's Fifth Homily on Ecclesiastes,* 210 – 211.

substituted ‘freedom from passion and blessedness’ for ‘peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’. Probably these themes were important and interrelated in Gregory’s moral theology. He frequently expresses opinion that the goal of the virtuous life is blessedness and it is to be free from passion.[245]

Further addressing his listeners, Gregory explains that gathering and collecting of worldly wealth drags down the soul of the sinner; therefore these things are futile. Thus Gregory contrasts the actions of the wise and the sinner. The wise lives by spiritual food given by God, the sinner, on the contrary, pursues bodily pleasure. From this brief interpretation one can conclude that Gregory understands worldly wealth and its gathering in Qohelet as futile and evil because it is connected with foolishness and sin. The wise man avoids earthly enjoyments, but follows virtue and lives on wisdom and knowledge of God.

3.2.4. Interpretation of Jerome.

Following his usual exegetical rule, Jerome offers literal and then allegorical interpretations of all Qohelet’s verses where wealth is described as futile. Jerome logically understands the verses **2:24 – 26** as a sequel to the previous passage about futility of human efforts.[246] Jerome notifies that he does not disregard historical meaning for the sake of resplendence of spiritual sense. Therefore according to literal meaning it is a gift of God that a pious man can use profit of his labours; vice versa, it is anger of God for the sinner that he gathers the wealth and does not use it, but gives to him who is good before God. However, it is vain because the whole thing ends with death.

After this plain reading Jerome mentions allegorical meaning. He explains that pursuit after wealth and pleasure and use of another’s property is not good and gift of God. Therefore, Qohelet speaks about a different good that is flesh and blood of Lamb of God. Who can enjoy it without God? Further Jerome asserts that God gives wisdom, knowledge and joy to the man who merits it because he sows the true; the sinner gets a misery to gather wealth. The cause of this misery is not in God, but in the free will of the sinner. Here Jerome expresses the common patristic idea that the cause of evil and sin is the wrong use of human free will. In this allegorical interpretation Jerome also mentions interesting idea that the wealth that the sinner gathers is false teachings. Getting to know these teachings, the pious man understands that they are vain and

[245] R.E. Heine shows that Gregory also defines human blessedness as likeness to God. The man has been created in a state of blessedness, but came into fellowship with evil by his free will and fell from that blessedness. Ibid., 212.
[246] For Latin text of interpretation see appendix 2.8. (cf. *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten,* 1086-1087).

came from the grasping for the wind. Similar comparison with heretical teachings is found also in Didymus's interpretation of Qoh.5:9.

At the beginning of the interpretation of passage **5:9 – 11**[247] Jerome considers it necessary to explain that Greek αργυριον ( ) means both silver and money. Jerome cites Tullius[248] who mentioned that some people were called riches (*pecuniosos*) because they had many cattle (*peculia*). Thus, in ancient times the wealth was defined by subject of property (whether cattle or silver). Jerome concludes that in this fragment Qohelet speaks about a niggard who never satisfies the wealth and the more he has, the more he desires. In order to prove this thought Jerome also cites non-Christian author: "miserly man needs always" (Horatius); stinginess does diminish neither of poverty nor of abundance" (noble historian[249]).

Further Jerome offers both literal and allegorical interpretation of the verse 5:11. In the first case Jerome explains that the poor man labours and enjoys sound sleep, but the rich is satisfied with wealth and can not sleep because of anxious thoughts and excessive drinking and eating. Going to allegorical meaning Jerome shows that the sleep means here the end of life. Therefore, better is the rest of the man who labours in this life and engages himself in good deeds as hard as he can. However, it is said about riches: *But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation* (Luc.6:24). This comparison of the sleep with death is very similar to the interpretation of this verse in Qohelet Rabbah and in Targum. It is unlikely, however, that Jerome was influenced by the rabbinic interpretation; it seems more probable that here both exegetical traditions understood sleep as symbol of death.

Jerome unites the verses **6:1 – 2** with the interpretation of the passage 6:1 – 6.[250] Here Jerome explains that Qohelet represents the rich man who has all earthly goods, but he is tormented with foolish avarice and is saving his wealth. Therefore, a stillborn child is better than this rich because his soul is not languid with anxiety and avarice. However, this literal interpretation is less interesting in comparison to the next allegorical one that includes in itself polemics against the Jews. Jerome writes that one can understand this Qohelet's thought by regerring to Israel. God has given Israel the law and prophets, covenant (Testament) and promise. The Savior in the meanwhile says: "the kingdom of God will be taken from you and

[247] For Latin text of interpretation see appendix 2.9. (cf. *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten,* 1108-1110).
[248] Apparently Jerome means Tullius who was Roman orator, jurist, writer and politician (106 -43 BCE).
[249] Commentary of editor in Patrologia Latina suggests that noble historian is Sallustius (86 – 34 BCE).
[250] For Latin text of interpretation see appendix 2.10. (cf. *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten,* 1111-1112).

given to a nation bearing the fruits of it". Israel sees the abovementioned goods, but does not uses them; as a result these goods will be given to others. Thus Jerome affirms that "we" (Christians) as "stillborn child" are in better condition in comparison to Abraham's children who swagger about their antiquity and forefathers. However, in spite of this difference between the Jews and Christians Jerome concludes that "both we and they go to the same place – God's Judgment". It is not the only example of polemics against the Jews in Jerome's commentary. There are many borrowings from Jewish tradition in his commentary – and yet Jerome frequently attacks Jews. Therefore, one is dealing here with the heated discussion between the two traditions about the question who is "true Israel." The interpretation of the Bible was the general subject of the discussion and polemics. Jerome and other patristic authors argue that the Jews witness the biblical truth, but do not understand it.[251]

In the commentary on the next passage (**Qoh 6:7 – 9)** Jerome again gradually turns from literal to allegorical and anagogical interpretations.[252] Initially Jerome comments on Qohelet's words using the terms of food and digestion. He concludes that the soul of a man is not satisfied because he again wishes to eat. Jerome also offers literal reading of the verse: both wise and foolish cannot live without food. The poor is concerned only about how to keep up his flesh and not to die of starvation; the soul does not get profit from satisfaction of the flesh. Later, however, Jerome suggests that the allegorical meaning of the text is better. One can understand this text as a reference to a man of the Church who is educated in the Holy Scripture and has his labours in his mouth; his soul is not satisfied because it permanently thirsts for learning. Relying on this reading of the text, Jerome tries to answer Qohelet's question: "For what more has the wise *man* than the fool?" The wise has advantage over the fool because he is poor in spirit, but blessed in the sense of Gospel; he follows the narrow path, is far from evil deeds and knows where Christ – our life – is.

When commenting the last verse of this passage, Jerome pays special attention to various translations of important words and expressions. In order to better understand the sentence "Better *is* the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire" Jerome uses the translation of

[251] Early Christians openly declared that they are "true Israel" because only they can adequately understand the Bible. The Jews, on the contrary, could not any more take part in the process of the interpretation because they refused to understand its true sense. Rabbinic sources also contain the claims that the Jews are "true Israel" because the Oral Torah was given only to Israel and It makes the Jewish people unique, i.e. the only sons of God. More detailed about this discussion see, for example, M. Simon, *Verus Israel,* trans. H. McKeating (Oxford, 1986); Marc Hirshman, *A Rivalry of Genius: Jewish and Christian Biblical Interpretation in Late Antiquity* (Albany, New York: State University of New York, 1996).

[252] For Latin text of interpretation see appendix 2.11. (cf. *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten,* 1112-1113).

Symmachus "better is to foresee (provide) than to wander anyhow". Thus, it is better to do everything according to directions of mind (mind is the eyes of the soul) than to follow the will of heart. In Jerome's opinion Qohelet's words can mean also proud and self-satisfied man.

Concluding his interpretation Jerome again explains the meaning of the words *raut ruah* according to Greek translations and Hebrew original. Thus, using the example of this interpretation, one can come to the conclusion that Jerome's interpretations represent highly sophisticated type of biblical commentaries. He simultaneously resorts to different exegetical methods, lexical analysis of words, literal reading, allegorical and anagogic interpretations.

3.2.5. Comparison

When speaking about the abovementioned verses, Qohelet Rabbah normally diverts from the literal meaning of the text. In spite of Qohelet's focus on this topic, Qohelet Rabbah often forgets to discuss the theme of futility of wealth. Generally speaking, Qohelet Rabbah interprets the text according to its exegetical interests. This fact notwithstanding, one can still find some in the Midrash some reflections concerning the subject of wealth.

Symbolic understanding of the text offered by Qohelet Rabbah suggests that eating and drinking (Qoh. 2:24 *There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour*) in the book of Qohelet signify the Torah and good deeds. Therefore, to a certain extent, the abovementioned goods are the wealth and the gift of God. On the basis of this claim Qohelet Rabbah continues by suggesting that true wealth is wisdom (given by God: Qoh 2:26). In order to prove this thought the Midrash resorts to typology. It mentions positive and negative biblical characters of a wise, to whom God gives wisdom and knowledge (true wealth), and of a fool, whose desire for gathering of earthly wealth is sin and futile work. To give an example, the Midrash uses the types of Abraham and Nimrod.

Qohelet Rabbah often has a tendency to turn the negative Qohelet's thoughts to positive, and to add a new meaning to the verse. Thus, it associates a rich man with a righteous rabbi. Whoever has laboured on the Torah in this world, has great wealth in the world to come. Wise is not allowed to sleep in the Hereafter, but is taken to the Academy of Shem and Eber, and of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses and Aaron. Qohelet Rabbah also does not blame the dissatisfaction of greedy rich, but understands Qohelet's reflection (5:10) as a praise to God for his ability to provide for all the resurrected in the world to come. Continuing to see in the wealth the symbol of God's gifts, the Midrash argues that riches denote to the master of Scripture, wealth – the master of Mishnah, and honour – the master of Tosefta. From the fragments

mentioned above one can conclude that the Midrash mainly uses allegorical method and applies the text to current rabbinic themes.

While discussing the vanity of wealth, Didymus resorts to several exegetical approaches and at the same time touches upon important theological and ethical themes. To give an example, according to a literal interpretation a rich man shall not be satisfied with his wealth because his desire increases with his money. Following an allegorical meaning of the text, however, wealth and silver can mean the Word of the Lord. He who loves it shall be satisfied with it.

In Didymus' opinion the question of the vanity of wealth is based on the right use of it. If a man thinks that he can surpass others by wealth, then he is in great evil. However, if he thinks right and makes the right use of his riches, then he surpasses other people in his good deeds. In general, a wise man is neutral to wealth and fame because he is over earthly values. A man can use riches and wealth both for a good and evil purpose; therefore, these things can be good and bad. Thus God does not give a man power to eat of his wealth because he incorrectly follows his desires to use the goods of the wealth. Therefore, according to Didymus' reading, earthly wealth is futile in comparison to spiritual goods. Nevertheless, wealth can be valuable if it is used properly.

One can conclude that Gregory's attitude to the earthly wealth is negative. He argues that gathering and collecting of worldly wealth drag down the soul of the sinner. Therefore, he comes to the conclusion that these things are futile. While commenting the passage 2:24 – 26, Gregory contrasts earthly and spiritual wealth. Thus he tries to see the symbol of spiritual food in eating and drinking. The wise lives by spiritual food given by God. This food is wisdom and knowledge and joy. The sinner, on the contrary, pursues bodily pleasure and gathers the wealth.

Similarly to Didymus, Jerome also suggests that wealth in itself is good. In his opinion, it is a gift of God that a pious man can use profit of his labours. However, pursuit after wealth and pleasure and use of another's property is evil deed. Following allegorical reading Jerome argues that wealth and food mentioned in Qohelet can mean another good that is flesh and blood of Lamb of God. True food, wisdom, knowledge and joy are given to a man who merits it because he sows the true, while sinner gets a misery to gather wealth. However, this way of sinner is his choice because a man acts only according to his free will.

At the first sight it seems that rabbinic and patristic interpretations are very different. Qohelet Rabbah frequently quotes tales, stories and parables that have nothing to do with the original text of Qohelet. However, in order to find out a connection between the Midrash and the biblical text, one must take a closer look at symbols and images used by rabbinic exegesis. Of course, the Midrash is less than patristic exegetes concerned with interpretation of the biblical text. This is why we practically do not see in Qohelet Rabbah explanation why wealth could be vanity. Offering positive reading of Qohelet, Midrash understands wealth as symbol of God's gifts that are the written and oral Torah, wisdom and knowledge, requital in the world to come. Church Fathers are more concrete in their definition of futility of earthly wealth. Their interpretations, however, also have a tendency to see in wealth an allusion to spiritual wealth. Thus, according to Didymus wealth and silver can mean the Word of the Lord, while in Jerome's reading wealth and food, which are mentioned in Qohelet, can mean the flesh and blood of the Lamb of God. It is evident that Rabbis and Fathers offer such different variants of the interpretation of spiritual wealth because of the difference in their religious traditions. Nevertheless, their tendencies and methods are similar and parallel.

Similar approach to the text is not only the evidence of religious dialogue, polemics and controversy; it can also can testify to possible encounters and contacts between the two religious and exegetic traditions. Thus, in one Jerome's interpretations, which has been analyzed above, one can find Christian polemics against Judaism. Jerome associates a rich man with the Jews who have great wealth – the Holy Tradition – but use it incorrectly because they do not recognize the truth that comes in Christ. Therefore, antireligious polemics frequently found place in exegetical works of rabbinic and patristic traditions alike – largely because of the fact that the Bible itself was the best argument for the evidence of the truth of each religion.

One can identify this tendency, which was used by Jewish and Christian exegetes at the same time, as spiritualization of Qohelet's text. Resorting to this spiritualization both the Rabbis and Fathers had rewritten Qohelet's text in the context of their religious interest in order to make the book acceptable for their respective religious teaching and tradition. For rabbinic Judaism true wealth is the fruits of the study of the Torah. Therefore, worldly wealth is vain in comparison to spiritual wealth of the Torah that a wise man receives for his labours. While spiritualizing Qohelet's text, Church Father in their turn introduced the terms and values of Christian faith that can represent spiritual wealth. According to the Fathers the aim of the Book of Qohelet is to turn human soul away from earthly values and lead it to the heavens. This is why "wealth" in Qohelet is most likely a reference to spiritual values. In this case rabbinic and

patristic sources understand *hebel*-concept in the context of the opposition of worldly wealth to the values of spiritual religious wealth. At the same time, while spiritualizing the wealth, both Jewish and Christian commentaries have avoided collision with Qohelet's pessimistic attitude to the wealth that he gained. Moreover, literal interpretation of the wealth offered by Didymus and Jerome also contradicts to Qohelet's view. Both exegetes, for example, argue that the wealth by itself is not bad while its use could be good or evil.

3.3. Mirth and pleasure is *hebel*

Qoh. 2:1 I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure"; but surely, this also was vanity.

In Qohelet's opinion mirth (*simha*) also is *hebel*. Qohelet advised to enjoy the life and feel mirth. However, it is vanity because laugh is foolishness while mirth is not useful and is absurd. Qohelet tried to find value and sense in mirth although pleasure disappointed him.[253] In this verse *hebel* describes mirth and pleasure as transient and insubstantial.[254] They are relative good and disappear after death. Therefore it is also illusory.[255]

Qoh. **7:6** For like the crackling of thorns under a pot, So is the laughter of the fool. This also is vanity.

This statement is included in a passage with practical proverbs for daily living (7:1 – 14). In previous verses Qohelet contrasts wisdom with foolishness (7: 2 – 5): *The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth*. Senseless mirth and laugh is the evidence of foolishness of a man, but severity and reflections make a man wise. Therefore, foolish laugh is *hebel*.[256] In order to clearly describe the senseless and vanity of the mirth and laugh Qohelet uses expressive image: "like the crackling of thorns under a pot". Onomatopoeia makes this image more significant. The thorns burned in fire disappear and become smoke. Foolish laugh, similarly, is empty and futile.

[253] M. Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions,* 41.
[254] C.L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 126; D. B. Miller, "Qohelet's Symbolic Use of ," 447.
[255] Benjamin L. Berger, "Qohelet and the Exigencies of the Absurd," 146-147.
[256] Fox and Good suggest that *hebel* here is not foolish laugh but oppression of wise man (7:7) (E. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*, 180; M. Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 41). However, the context of the passage 7:2-6 shows that *hebel* indeed is definition of mirth and laugh. Even though a wise becomes fool because of his unfair deed, his mirth also will be vain (C.L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 237, 247).

3.3.1. Interpretation of Midrash Qohelet Rabbah

In the commentary on the verse **2:1** Qohelet Rabbah offers different types of reading this passage; each of them is far from the primary meaning of the text.[257] First, the Midrash changes the sense of the quoted verse with the use of a pun on the Hebrew word. "R. Phinehas and R. Hezekiah in the name of R. Simon b. Zabdi commented on this. R. Phinehas said: *anassekah* (I will try you) and *anuskah* (I will flee you). I will try the words of Torah and I will try the words of heresy; I will flee from words of heresy to words of Torah." In the light of this reading the enjoyment of pleasure is the pleasure of the Torah. Thus, by changing the sense of the text, the Midrash moves from personal earthly pleasure to spiritual joy. This treatment is similar to the abovementioned rabbinic tendency to see a reference to the Torah in eating and drinking in Qohelet. However, the midrash understands that Qohelet speaks here about the vanity of pleasure; this is why it decides to explain what *hebel* means in accordance with the rabbinic interpretation. "R. Simon said: All the Torah which you learn in this world is vanity in comparison with Torah in the world to come, because in this world a man learns Torah and forgets it, but what is written concerning the world to come? *I will put my law in their inward parts.* (Jer. 31:33)". Therefore, the Midrash sees essential distinction between the pleasure of the Torah in this world and enjoyment of the Torah in the world to Come. Adhering to its symbolism, Qohelet Rabbah finally offers the allegorical interpretation that to a certain extent is closer to the original meaning of the biblical text. "All the prosperity which a man experiences in this world is vanity in comparison with prosperity of the world to come; because in this world a man dies and bequeaths his prosperity to another, but about the world to come it is written, *They shall not build, and another inhabit* (Isa. 65:22)."

One can see that the Midrash intentionally follows symbolic reading of the text by denying that Solomon could speak about simple worldly pleasure. Therefore, Solomon, as a model of a wise, means here the highest level of pleasure, namely the study of the Torah in this life and in the world to come. Moreover, the Midrash consciously emphasizes the advantage of prosperity and pleasure of the world to come over this earthly world.

Targum Qohelet, on the contrary, offers literal reading of the text. It also adds several additional phrases: "I said to myself *I will* go hither and try rejoicing and see the good *of the world but when trouble and affliction came upon me, I said to myself* Behold this too is

[257] For Hebrew text of interpretation see appendix 3.1.

vanity".[258] Targum does not explain why mirth and pleasure are futile. However, being aware of the vanity of all earthly goods, a man gives way to despair.

The verse **7:6** is interpreted by R. Levi b. R. Zeira who uses it in his sermons.[259] Abraham Cohen suggests that he included this interpretation in his inaugural address, i.e. when he received permission to become a Rabbi.[260] Rabbi Levi offers literal interpretation resorting to illustration: "When all other woods are kindled their sound does not travel far, but when thorns are kindled, their sound travels far, as though to say, 'We too are wood' ". By this interpretation the Midrash means that a fool cackles in order to make his presence felt. The fool thinks that his loud and provocative behavior makes him significant in the society. Targumic translation practically does not differ from the Hebrew text of Qohelet: "For as the crackling sound *of thorns which burn under the pot* so is the laughing *sound* of the fool. Also this is vanity."[261]

3.3.2. Interpretation of Gregory of Nyssa

Interpreting the verse **2:1** Gregory thematically unites it with the verse 2:2 and describes how Ecclesiastes (Solomon) tested pleasure and found it futile.[262] The main thought that Gregory wishes to express by his interpretation is that mirth, laugh and fleshly pleasure deprive a man of his mind and soul. Another idea, which is offered by Gregory, is that Solomon tested all the abovementioned pleasures in order to investigate whether the sensual experience of them makes any contribution to the knowledge of true Good. However he did not give himself to this kind of experience without having tasted the austere and more devout life. This idea is very similar with Gregory's interpretation on 2:18 – 23: in order to discuss the futility of worldly things it is necessary to investigate them by wisdom and knowledge. Therefore, a wise man will follow the example of Solomon in his virtuous life. Further Gregory explains why Ecclesiastes is right saying that laughter is madness (2:2). Laughter is an unseemly loss of bodily control: convulsion in the breath, paroxysms in the whole body, distention of the cheeks, exposure of the teeth, gums and palate, bending of the neck, unpredictable weakness in the voice, punctuated by gasps of breath. Thus, in Gregory's opinion pleasure and mirth have negative and futile nature. A wise man, by testing it by wisdom, will not subordinate his soul to them.

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[258] *The Targum Qohelet,* 21.
[259] For Hebrew text of interpretation see appendix 3.2.
[260] *Midrash Rabbah. Ecclesiastes,* trans. A. Cohen, 178.
[261] *The Targum Qohelet,* 38.
[262] For Greek text of interpretation see appendix 3.3. (cf. *In Ecclesiasten,* 645-648).

3.3.3. Interpretation of Jerome

Jerome begins to describe Qohelet's experience with the literal interpretation of the verse **2:1**.[263] Knowing that in much wisdom and knowledge there is much grief and sorrow, Qohelet decided to inquire the life passing to the pleasure and luxury. However, it is also vanity because pleasure in the past does not satisfy desire in the present. Examining the futility of worldly pleasure, Jerome shows that not only a joy of flesh, but also spiritual joy is temptation because it can induce a man to be exalted above others. Therefore, Satan captures people by abundance of the goods. Thus, satiety can lead to denial of God (Solomon warns against that in Prov. 30:8f). Concluding his interpretation Jerome suggests that one can understand this verse in the light of 1Cor.13:12. It means that spiritual pleasure now is vanity because we see it in a mirror, dimly. When being revealed face to face, it will be truth. Thus, basing his views on biblical verses, Jerome asserts that in this case allegorical interpretation is more acceptable.

For the verse **7:6** Jerome offers a brief interpretation which he unites with the sense of the previous verse (Qoh 7:5).[264] He compares crackling of thorns with the words of flattering teacher who imposes on his listeners worldly problems. These words like the thorns are useless and therefore futile. And also the words of such teachers can enmesh with bonds of sin. Thus Jerome changes separate meaning of the verse and does not speak here about futility of mirth and laughter.

3.3.4. Comparison

Qohelet Rabbah follows symbolic reading of the text and does not suggest that here the text speaks about simple worldly pleasure. Thus the Midrash understands Qohelet's words with respect to the pleasure of the study of the Torah. Thus the study of the Torah in this world is vain in comparison with its study in the world to come.

Church Fathers pay more attention to the discussion of vanity of earthly pleasure. Gregory's interpretation determines the negative influence of the pleasure and mirth on the soul. At the same time, investigation of pleasure can help to reach the knowledge of true Good. Jerome specifies that both worldly and spiritual pleasure can be a cause of vanity and degradation because a man can get a false idea of his own importance. However, while preferring to speak about spiritual pleasure or truth, Jerome suggests that in earthly reality it may

[263] For Latin text of interpretation see appendix 3.4. (cf. *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten,*1076).
[264] For Latin text of interpretation see appendix 3.5. (cf. *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten,*1115-1116).

be considered vanity because it reveals itself like in a mirror, dimly. In the world to Come, though, the truth will be seen face to face.

It is erroneous to speak here about a borrowing – and yet one can notice that Jerome's and midrashic conclusions are to a certain extent quite similar. Both exegetical schools assert that their religious truth is negatively influenced by vanity in this world; in the world to come the pleasure of the study of the Holy Scripture will get rid of futile nature.

In this case, similarly to the interpretation of previous theme, rabbinic and patristic sources again rewrite and change the meaning of Qohelet by resorting to the spiritualization of the text in order to make the book acceptable for their respective religious teaching and tradition. However, spiritualizing here the text of the book, Qohelet Rabbah does not reject Qohelet's pessimism, but transfers it to allegorical reading. Thus, the Midrash argues that the study of the Torah shall be perfect in the Heavens in comparison with Its study in this earthly reality. Church Fathers, in contrast to the Rabbis, suggest ascetic reading of the book of Qohelet and consequently see in earthly pleasure a real danger for a Christian man. On the other hand, patristic reading finds certain value in earthly pleasure because human soul becomes perfect when realizing its vanity. Most probably Jewish and Christian commentaries have rewritten Qohelet's text in order to demonstrate that Solomon's perfect wisdom achieves high spiritual pleasure and his experience is example for imitation for a pious man.

3.4. Human speech is *hebel*

Qoh. 5:6 For in the multitude of dreams and many words there is also vanity. But fear God.

In the verse 5:6 *hebel* defines human speech. Also the context of previous verses (5:1 – 5) condemns excessive and empty wordiness.[265] Qohelet warns against excessive, senseless and absurd words.[266] *Ḥălôm* (dream) in this case is a synonym of *hebel*; obviously both words express the idea of emptiness.[267]

Qoh. 6:11 Since there are many things that increase vanity, How is man the better?

[265] There are syntactical ambiguities in this verse that complicate a translation. Commentators offer different explanations of prefix *waw* in the word *udebarim* (cf. R. Gordis, *Koheleth*, 249; C.L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 197).
[266] M. Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 43
[267] C.L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 197; D. B. Miller, "Qohelet's Symbolic Use of ," 447.

In the verse 6:11 Qohelet asserts that there are many words that increase vanity. It can be absurdity of this world that increases together with these words.[268] And following rhetoric question *mah yyotēr lā'ādam* explains that a man has no profit from senseless and empty words.

3.4.1. Interpretation of Midrash Qohelet Rabbah

Qohelet Rabbah offers two interpretations of the verse **5:6**.[269] As usual, it uses Qohelet's words in order to introduce actual rabbinic reflections. Thus, in the first interpretation, the Midrash develops the discussion about ill-omened dreams and deliverance from them. R. Judah said about it: three things annul evil decrees – prayer, charity and repentance. Each method the Midrash provides with citation from the Bible (2Chron. 7:14) as evidence of rabbinic thought. So *My people pray*, i.e. prayer, *And seek my face*, i.e. charity, *And turn from their evil ways*, i.e. repentance. According to R. Mana fasting also annuls evil decrees. Thus, using Qohelet's text, the Midrash decides to give its listeners practical advise in effective struggle against evil dreams.

The next interpretation is offered in the form of biblical aggadah where the Midrash at the same time explains Qohelet's verse and a story in the Book of Isaiah (Isa. 38:1 – 5). One can find here quite a peculiar treatment of this fragment. "When Hezekiah fell ill, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Isaiah, 'Go and tell him, *Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live*". However, according to the Midrash, Hezekiah did not pay attention to Isaiah's words, affirming that when a person visits an invalid he does not say him such words. And so Hezekiah answered to Isaiah using Qohelet's verse.

Further Qohelet Rabbah offers extensive interpretation of the next verse of Isaiah (38:2) *Hezekiah turned his face to the wall.* The Midrash mentions four variants of reading supplying each with citation of the Bible: Rahab's wall (Josh. 2:15), wall of the Shunammite (2Kings 4:10), chambers of the heart (Jer. 4:19), walls of the Temple (Ezek. 43:8). Thus interpretation of the abovementioned biblical passages is put in the mouth of Hezekiah. He ends each fragment with similar phrase: *how much more should You grant me my life.* It is difficult to explain why the Midrash includes in its discussion interpretation of another biblical passage that at first sight has nothing to do with our fragment. One can only suggest that Qohelet Rabbah follows its favorite methods to interpret one biblical verse by another. By using this approach the Midrash again proves the unity of the biblical text. Later the interpretation reports that God has heard Hezekiah's prayer and sent Isaiah to inform Hezekiah that he would receive

[268] M. Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 42.
[269] For Hebrew text of interpretation see appendix 4.1.

the life because he was a humble man. Further development of the story is more interesting and differs from the biblical text. Isaiah spoke before God: "Lord of the universe, at first Thou say one thing to me and now another thing; how can I go and tell him this?" One can ask why the Midrash allows an argument between God and Isaiah. This familiarity can be seen as a feature of aggadic literature that frequently contains various talks and discussions between God and heroes of the aggadot. When Isaiah went to Hezekiah with the second message, he again paid no attention to Isaiah's words and advice, and replied to him with Qohelet's verse 5:6. It is very difficult to deduce some moral lesson from this midrashic interpretation. By using the aggadic approach Qohelet Rabbah obviously demonstrates close logical connection between each biblical verse. For modern exegetes this method may seem strange and unacademic. Nevertheless, for the rabbinic mind, logics and theology strongly differ very much from our understanding of these matters.

In the commentary on Qoh.5:6 Targum decides to personify dreams, vanities and words mentioned by Qohelet. "For in the multitude of the dreams of *the false prophets* and vanities *of the sorcerers and* the many words *of the wicked, do not believe, but serve the wise and the righteous and seek from them instruction* and fear the Lord".[270] Thus Targum understands this verse as practical advice not to follow magic and heretical teachings but adhere to the virtue and faith of Abraham.

Interpreting the verse **6:11**[271] Qohelet Rabbah translates the Hebrew word as "things." Therefore, the Midrash does not agree that here Qohelet speaks about the futility of words and human speech. The Midrash bases its interpretation on Qohelet's question *what is man the better?* In order to demonstrate that there are some useless and futile things in the world, Qohelet Rabbah lists animals that may not be eaten, that are harmful – and, therefore, are useless. Further the Midrash leads to another illustration of useless things. It tells about a pious man who was once removing stones from his field and placing them in the public road. It is clear that one either can stumble over them or suffer a contusion. After a while that pious man fell into need and sold his field. He was walking along that public road and stumbled over the stones. Most probably that by this aggadah Qohelet Rabbah shows that each human action should have a benefit. Futile deeds and things only increase vanity.

[270] *The Targum Qohelet*, 34.
[271] For Hebrew text of interpretation see appendix 4.2.

The targum does not change Qohelet's verse. Nevertheless, it adds explanatory phrases and also interprets the Hebrew word not as *the words*, but as *the things*: "For there are many things that increase the vanity *in this world.* What advantage does a man have *who occupies himself with them*".[272] Thus, the one who follows futile things will never have any benefit from them. The targum also considers it necessary again to emphasize that Qohelet speaks in his book only about *this* world under the sun.

3.4.2. Interpretation of Jerome

While commenting the verse **5:6** Jerome offers two interpretations. He defines the first of them as Jewish and the second as allegorical.[273] Jerome obviously heard this "Jewish" interpretation from his Hebrew teacher. Jerome says that while commenting this verse, the Jews advice not to believe credulously in dreams. If a man believes in dreams, he commends himself to vanity and indecencies. Therefore, he must disdain these visions of dreams and fear only God. This interpretation is not identical either with the abovementioned reading of Qohelet Rabbah, or with the Targum. However, in all three sources one can find strong negation of the belief in dreams. Therefore, it is possible to discern here the trace of exegetical encounters between the Jews and Christians.

In the second interpretation Jerome affirms that Qohelet means here the dream of life. A man lives like in shadow, justifies his sins and thinks that God is far from him. However, God is present at all human deeds, while man acts of his own free will that was granted to him by Creator. Thus, one can see that Jerome includes and unites in the commentary on one verse the Jewish reading and the Christian allegorical interpretation which is based on the theological teaching of free will.

Jerome sees the unity of the verses **6:11 – 12** and, therefore, interprets them together.[274] Jerome's reading is completely allegorical. Thus, he not only demonstrates why human speech is vain, but also explains human condition in this earthly reality. Like in previous commentary on Qoh. 2:1, Jerome again tries to explain the text resorting to Apostle's Paul words and images in 1Cor.13:12. Speaking about goods of human life, which are mentioned by Qohelet in 6:12, Jerome understands these as truth. Therefore, a man does not completely know benefit of his life.

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[272] *The Targum Qohelet,* 37.
[273] For Latin text of interpretation see appendix 4.3. (cf. *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten,*1107).
[274] For Latin text of interpretation see appendix 4.4. (cf. *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten,* 1114).

The truth that Christian sees in this world is only shadow and image of the truth that he will know in the heaven, in the presence of the Lord. Further Jerome decides to connect this idea of imperfect earthly condition with Qohelet's expression about vain human speech. Thus he explains that a man does not completely know the truth and the future, and cannot avoid a sin because of empty wordiness. Therefore, he must put a silence on his mouth. A pious man must also believe in Christ, not searching for how He is coming. Thus Jerome gives a practical advice in struggle with empty verbosity, sin, lack of faith and lack of knowledge of truth.

3.4.3. Comparison

Commenting Qohelet's text by aggadic stories, Qohelet Rabbah does not directly discuss the futility of human speech. One can notice that the Midrash accuses some works that, in its opinion, increase vanity. The main aim of midrashic readings here is to demonstrate the unity of the Bible by interpreting Qohelet. The best commentary of the Holy Scripture is the biblical text itself.

Jerome is the only Church Father who left commentaries on Qohelet's verses mentioned above. In contrast to rabbinic sources, Jerome is more exact in his attack on vain human speech. A twaddle leads to the sin and, therefore, to the negation of God. Thus, according to Jerome, silence and fear of God are better for a pious man. Here one can notice that Jerome explicitly refers to the Jewish interpretation. The comparison of commentaries of Jerome, Qohelet Rabbah, and Targum show that these sources shared a common idea that belief in dreams is evil and vain deed.

3.5. Wisdom is *hebel*

In Qohelet's world wisdom (*hokhmah*) is a central concept; during the whole book Qohelet inquires the life, laws of world, and his experience just by force of wisdom. Most probably by Qohelet's wisdom one can understand the traditional wisdom literature of the ancient Near East rather than wisdom of Greek philosophy.[275] The author of the book successfully resorts to the image of the king Solomon as the wisest man in the world. However, in the process of his examination Qohelet understands limitedness of his wisdom and knowledge. Unfortunately, a wise man cannot understand and explain all that happens under the sun; he cannot comprehend God's deeds either. Therefore, human wisdom has some aspects of futility.

[275] C.L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 145; G.S. Ogden, *Qohelet. Readings: A new Biblical Commentary* (Sheffeld: JOST Press, 1987), 34.

Qohelet frequently speaks about the imperfection of wisdom (1:13, 1:18, 7:23, and 8:16 – 17); he uses *hebel*-definition only in one passage (2:12 – 15).

Qoh. 1:13 And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised.

Already at the beginning of the book Qohelet doubts the force of wisdom. He suggests that effort to study and probe the world and its laws with wisdom is useless. The pursuit for wisdom is not only useless, but also unhappy business given by God.

Qoh. 1:18 For in much wisdom is much grief, And he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

Study of wisdom and folly leaves Qohelet disappointed because knowledge leads him to a heartache. Therefore, search for wisdom and knowledge is vanity and vexation of spirit. There was a common idea in the wisdom literature of the Near East that pain and trouble lead to wisdom.[276] However, Qohelet changes this teaching and asserts that wisdom, on the contrary, leads to pain and suffering.

Qoh. 2:12 – 15 Then I turned myself to consider wisdom and madness and folly; For what can the man do who succeeds the king? Only what he has already done. Then I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness. The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. Yet I myself perceived that the same event happens to them all. So I said in my heart, "As it happens to the fool, it also happens to me, and why was I then more wise?" Then I said in my heart, "This also is vanity."

Obviously, in this passage *hebel* defines not only the wisdom, but the whole situation: both a wise and a fool have similar fate (death). At the beginning of his reflection Qohelet supposes that as light excels darkness, so the wisdom excels folly (2:13). However, later Qohelet realizes great contradiction and injustice: wise and folly equally die. He can not understand this fact, so it is *hebel.*[277] In spite of the advantage of wisdom, the pursuit for it is absurd,[278]

[276] C.L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 149.
[277] Ibid.,154-155.
[278] M. Fox, "The Meaning of *Hebel* for Qohelet", 420.

illusory,[279] vain,[280] and empty.[281] The wisdom did not give Qohelet truth benefit for what he sought.

Qoh. 7:23 All this I have proved by wisdom. I said, "I will be wise"; But it was far from me.

Qohelet tried to understand the world and nature of human existence by wisdom. However, he realized that capacity of his wisdom is limited and he can not comprehend the laws of universe.

Qoh. 8:16f When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that is done on earth, even though one sees no sleep day or night, then I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. For though a man labours to discover it, yet he will not find it; moreover, though a wise man attempts to know it, he will not be able to find it.

Qohelet examined all that happen under the sun and he concluded that there are injustice and absurdity in the world. And after his search Qohelet received evidence that in spite of all of his attempts, a wise can not understand the deeds of God and the laws of the world and existence. Therefore the search for wisdom is fruitless and futile.

3.5.1. Interpretation of Midrash Qohelet Rabbah

Qohelet Rabbah offers several interpretations on the verse **1:13.**[282] In the first interpretation the Midrash tries to explain what means *to search out* ( ) *by wisdom*. It means that Solomon becomes an explorer of wisdom; he sits in the presence of him who teaches the Scripture well or expounds Mishnah well.

Qohelet Rabbah further mentions various interpretations of the words *it is sore task.* The Midrash first assumes that the sore task is the nature of wealth. The more man has, the more he wants. However if a man uses his wealth for pious purposes, when he prays – he is answered (e.g. Gen. 30:33). Should he not use his wealth in this manner, it will testify against him and accuse him (Deut. 29:16). Thus Qohelet Rabbah takes the verse out of the context and decides to

[279] D. B. Miller, "Qohelet's Symbolic Use of ," 447.
[280] C.L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*,154-155.
[281] R.B. Scott, *Proverbs. Ecclesiastes*, 216.
[282] For Hebrew text of interpretation see appendix 5.1.

speak about the futility of wealth. One can suppose that this rabbinic reflection may serve as the literal explanation of Qoh. 5:9 whose interpretation is absent in the Midrash. In the next interpretation the Midrash understands the sore task as the symbol of the peculiar character of robbery. Robbery will be accused first of all iniquities before the judgment throne of God. Therefore, the robbery is great vanity and evil.

The next two interpretations correlate Qohelet's verse with the Tanakh. Rabbi Hunia related this verse to the Prophets and Hagiographa, for if the Israelites had been worthy, they would have read the Pentateuch alone. The Prophets and Hagiographa were only given to them to labour in these as well as in the Pentateuch, and perform the precepts and righteous acts so as to receive a good reward.[283] Continuing this theme, the Midrash refers Qohelet's words in the name of rabbi Abbahu to the peculiar study character of the study of the Torah. A man learns the Torah, but forgets it. It seems that pursuit of the Torah knowledge is sore and futile task since a man can not remember what he learns because of his imperfect memory. This rabbinic thought is to a certain extent rebuke of God creation. However, the Midrash decides to moderate this statement and offers a positive interpretation. "The Babilonian rabbis said; It is for man's good that he learns Torah and forgets it; because if a man studied Torah and never forgot it, he would occupy himself with learning it for two or three years, resume his ordinary work and never pay further attention to it. But since a man studies Torah and forgets it, he will not entirely abandon its study." Thus, God's decision is right and a man can earn the reward by his permanent study. This idea of the forgetfulness of the Torah is consonant with the previous interpretation of Qoh.2:1. Here the Midrash offers full explanation of differences between the study of the Torah in this world and after death.

One can conclude that the Midrash is in general rather far from the literal meaning of the text and prefers to interpret Qohelet by using symbols and vital rabbinic questions.

The targum, in contrast to Midrash Qohelet Rabbah, offers historical reading of the verse that associates Qohelet with Solomon. "And I set my mind to seek instruction *from the time when he revealed himself to me at Gibeon* to test me and to *ask me what I wanted from Him. And I asked of Him only* wisdom *to know the difference between good and evil understanding* of everything that happened under the sun *in this world. I saw all the deeds of sinful people* were an

[283] While commenting this fragment, Cohen points out to the fact that most of the prophets and Hagiographa contain rebukes to Israel for their wrong doing. Therefore, this part of the Bible owes its existence to Israel's sinning (*Midrash Rabbah. Ecclesiastes*, trans. A. Cohen, 40).

evil matter *which* the Lord gave to the people so that they should be afflicted by it."[284] Targum interprets Qohelet's verse in the light of 1King. 3:5 – 9. Solomon asked of God an understanding heart to judge God's people and to discern between good and evil. According to the Targum, sore task given by God is not pursuit for wisdom, but all deeds of sinful people.

Commenting the verse **1:18** Qohelet Rabbah offers four interpretations.[285] One can define the first interpretation as a literal interpretation because of the fact that the Midrash agrees with Qohelet's words. Furthermore, it attributes these words to the king Solomon. "All the time that a man increases wisdom he increases vexation, and all the time that he increases knowledge he increases suffering."[286] It is highly unusual for rabbinic tradition to connect wisdom with suffering because the pursuit of wisdom was one of the highest goals. However, the Midrash suggests that attainment of wisdom is the cause of pain. Ruth Sandberg supposes that here the Midrash reflects the period of the Roman domination, possibly during Hadrian's reign, when teaching the Torah was punishable by death. This could certainly be viewed as the ultimate suffering that accompanies wisdom.[287]

The second interpretation is represented in the form of the *mashal* that tells a story about two men. One of them ate coarse bread and vegetables; the other ate fine bread and fat meat, drank old wine, partook of an oily sauce and came out feeling ill. The man who had fine food suffered harm, while he who had coarse food escaped harm. Therefore, this parable confirms Qohelet's words. A man who feeds his mind with much learning and knowledge more suffers than the ignorant man. And his responsibility is greater.

The next interpretation is also connected with the commentary of Genesis Rabbah on Gen.3. The Midrash explains that because of the fact that the wisdom of the serpent was so great (Gen.3:1), therefore was the penalty inflicted upon it proportionate to its wisdom. Here, by interpretation of another biblical verse, the Midrash again emphasizes the responsibility of a wise man for use of his wisdom.

In the last interpretation Qohelet Rabbah resorts to the method of typology. By using biblical characters it affirms that there are some who increased wisdom to their advantage (Moses, Solomon), and others who increased it to their disadvantage (Doeg (1Sam.22:18ff),

[284] *The Targum of Qohelet*, 21.
[285] For Hebrew text of interpretation see appendix 5.2.
[286] One can read the same interpretation in Genesis Rabbah 19:1 in connection with the serpent that persuades Eve to eat the fruits from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. By getting knowledge our progenitors at the same time were punished by further suffering on the earth.
[287] R. N. Sandberg, *Rabbinic Views of Qohelet*, 101-102.

Ahitophel (2Sam. 17:23)). The strength can be also increased to advantage (David, Judah) and disadvantage (Samson, Goliath). The same happens with wealth. The Midrash offers the types of David and Solomon, Korah and Haman. The latter example supposes that many children can be to advantage (Jacob, David) and *vise versa* to disadvantage (Ahab, Eli). Using this typology Qohelet Rabbah again reminds about the unity of the biblical text: the story of one biblical hero can be connected with another story in the Bible.

Thus Qohelet Rabbah agrees with Qohelet that wisdom can entail the suffering; the pain in large measure is dependent from high standard of knowledge. The Targum, in its commentary on this verse, affirms that suffering and vexation increase because of sin. "Surely, *a man who* multiplies wisdom, *when he sins and does not repent*, increase anger *before the Lord.* And he who increases knowledge *and dies in his youth increases heartache.*"[288] The wisdom and sin are incompatible and give rise only to anger and vexation.

In spite of the unity in the meaning of the passage **2:12 – 15** Qohelet Rabbah does not comment it as one theme.[289] When speaking about the verse 2:12, the Midrash offers several interpretations that explain separate phrases. For the interpretation of the phrase *And I turned myself to behold wisdom* Qohelet Rabbah resorts to the word play and reads (I emptied myself) instead of (I turned myself). The Midrash compares a bowl which at times is filled and at other times emptied with Solomon, who learn the Torah at one time and forget it another time. This interpretation is similar to the previous midrashic reflection on studying the Torah in this world (Qoh.2:1; 1:13).

The next interpretation explains the phrase *to behold wisdom and madness and folly*. Qohelet Rabbah reads the words madness and folly metaphorically. In this way madness refers to the intrigues of rulership[290] or to the madness of heresy; folly means trouble[291] or inanity.

The phrase *for what can the man do who succeeds the king* the Midrash understands in respect of God. The Midrash advises, "if a man tells you, 'I can stand upon the foundation of the world'[292], answer him. 'You are unable to understand a human king; how then can you comprehend the supreme King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He!'". Therefore God and His

[288] *The Targum Qohelet*, 18.
[289] For Hebrew text of interpretation of this passage see appendix 5.3.
[290] Cohen shows that it can mean also the intrigues of Court life (*Midrash Rabbah. Ecclesiastes*, trans. A. Cohen, 61, ft. 5).
[291] According to Cohen's commentary, trouble is caused by lack of wisdom, or trouble refers to heavy cares of government (ibid., 61, ft. 6).
[292] It means that he can fathom Nature to its depths (ibid., 61, ft. 7).

works are inscrutable, and the Midrash here agrees with Qohelet in his conclusion that a man can not comprehend God's action and mysteries of the nature by his wisdom.

It is rather problematic to translate Qohelet's sentences that follow after this when taking into account the context of the verse. Here the English translation does not coincide with the Hebrew text grammatically. means: *that they already have made.* Continuing the association with God, which we have analyzed in the previous passage, Qohelet Rabbah tries to explain what the words *they have made* refer to. The Midrash supposes that under the word "they" God and His *Beth Din* (i.e. "court of justice") are meant.[293] The Midrash further explains that "they" took a vote concerning every one of our limbs and made us perfect. Everything has been made after consultation among "them" and "their" mutual agreement.

Thus Qohelet Rabbah expresses the idea about two main creative powers. According to rabbinic views the prototype of *beit din* has already existed at the time of creation. The Midrash further continues to develop the theme of the process of the creation; at the same time it interprets Gen.2:7. According to rabbinic views the phrase *Then the Lord God formed* ( ) *man* indicates that the Creator ( ) is skilful artist ( ). God boasts of His universe, creation which He has created and the form which He has constructed. The Midrash also considers it necessary to explain the verse Gen.2:4 *These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created.* The letter in the word is interpreted in the Midrash as indicating "He". He created them and He praised them, so who would presume to decry them. Continuing to explain the meaning of the letter Qohelet Rabbah assumes that God created them with this letter.[294] Thus one can see how skillfully Qohelet Rabbah includes in the interpretation of one verse important theological themes of creation process. By understanding Qohelet's words metaphorically, the Midrash associates the king with God, the Creator of the universe.

Commenting the next verse (**Qoh 2:13**) Qohelet Rabbah offers brief literal interpretation. "It has been taught in the name of Rabbi Meir: as there is superiority of light over the darkness, so there is superiority of words of Torah over words of vanity." Therefore, the words of the Torah are light and wisdom for man; a wise will avoid vanity, verbosity, and heresy.

[293] In Sab. 10 one can read that the judge who performs his duties conscientiously and delivers *din emet* (Heb. "true judgment") is as great as if he had taken part in the creation of the world.

[294] is often used to represent the name of God, as stands for *Hashem.* Cohen offers commentary that God created them with absolute ease, like the utterance of the letter , which requires a mere breath (ibid., 63, ft. 4).

There are two brief interpretations in the Midrash on the verse **2:14**. According to the first interpretation, the wise man has his eyes in his head because while he is still at the beginning of an enterprise, he knows where it will turn to. A wise has the end of business in his thought before he began it. By this interpretation the Midrash shows that the word can also mean "the beginning" and, therefore, it explains the sense of the text.

The second interpretation is represented in the form of typology. The Midrash associates the wise man with patriarch Abraham. The fool is associated with Nimrod, who tried to compel Abraham to idolatry. However, the Midrash concludes that they both have died, because Qohelet told that the same event happened to them all.

While interpreting the last verse (**Qoh 2:15**) Qohelet Rabbah mentions five interpretations; most of them see in Qohelet's words allusion to biblical types. The first interpretation looks like a sequel to the previous commentary. Qohelet's reflections are put in the mouth of Abraham and supplemented with rabbinic arguments. Abraham reasons: "I have been called 'king' and the wick Nimrod is cold 'king'. Both alike died; in that case, *why was I then more wise?* Why did I jeopardize my life for sanctification of the name of the Holy One, blessed be He." Further Abraham answers with Qohelet's words *for there is no remembrance of the wise man together with the fool for ever.* However Qohelet Rabbah feels contradiction and negative sense of the biblical text and the Midrash decides to change Qohelet's conclusion. "When adversity befalls Israel they cry, *Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Thy servants* (Ex.32:13); but do the heathen nations cry, 'Remember the deeds of Nimrod!'" Thus the Midrash suggests that the wise and pious man lives in the memory of others, while the fool and the sinner do not.

The second interpretation follows the same logic and brings about the types of Moses and Balaam. The eyes of first are in his head, but the second walks in darkness. Each of them was called by 'prophet'. In this case Moses asked why did he give his life to the Torah. And the Midrash answers: "In the future Israel will suffer adversity and cry, *Then His people remembered the days of old, the days of Moses* (Isa. 63:11), but do the heathen nations cry 'Then he remembered the days of old, the days of Balaam!'"

The next biblical types are David, king of Israel, and wicked Nebuchadnezzar. The former built the Temple[295] and reigned forty years, while the latter destroyed it and reigned forty years. David is rhetorically asking why he devoted himself to the building of the Temple. Qohelet Rabbah put the answer in the mouth of Solomon who built the Temple and said:

[295] Cohen supposes that erection of the Temple is attributed to David because he planned it (ibid., 65, ft.1).

Remember the good deeds of David Thy servant (2Chron. 6:42). David and Solomon are juxtaposed here against Evil-Merodach who could not stand up and say: *Remember the good deeds of Nebuchadnezzar Thy servant!* Therefore, by offering biblical allusions in three abovementioned interpretations, the Midrash most probably wishes to place Qohelet in the biblical historical context and thus again confirms the unity of the Bible.

The fourth interpretation uses the example from practical life. According to this interpretation, the wise is he who purchases wheat for three years, while the fool is he who purchases wheat for one year. The wise asked himself why he pawned the furniture of his room to provide himself with food. The Midrash offers clear and practical answer: a year of drought may come and the fool shall eat food at great coast, while the wise shall eat it at cheap price. Therefore, the wisdom is connected with practical approach to life and ability to reasonably keep the house.

The last interpretation discusses the study of the Torah among the rabbis. It opposes a disciple who is diligent in his study with one who neglects his study. Each is alike called "Rabbi," each is alike a "Sage." However, if there is no remembrance of wise and fool – why the former devoted himself to the study of the Torah? Qohelet Rabbah puts the answer in the mouth of rabbi Hiyya ben Nehemiah: "If a disciple thinks there is no necessity to quote a teaching in the name of his master, his knowledge of Torah will in the future be forgotten." Therefore, the name of Rabbi can live after his death because his disciples remember and quote his teaching. Thus, one can see that the Midrash applies Qohelet's text to the explanation of vital contemporary situation from rabbinic reality.

Translation of this passage in Targum differs from the biblical text and adds new meaning to each verse. Thus, in the verse 2:12 Targum speaks about a vain prayer instead of Qohelet's reflection that nobody, who follows in his steps, will ever have greater opportunities than he had for combining wisdom and wealth. "And I looked to see wisdom, the *intrigues of government* and understanding. *For what profit does man have to pray after the decree of* the king *and after the punishment? For by then it is* already decreed against him and done to him."[296] Targum agrees with Qohelet Rabbah concerning the intrigues of the rulership. According to the Targum, there is no profit form the prayer about the past events. The next verse practically does not differ from the Hebrew text: "I saw *though the Holy Spirit* that wisdom has an advantage

[296] *The Targum Qohelet*, 26.

over foolishness *as the advantage of* the light *of day* over the darkness *of night.*"[297] Commenting the verse 2:14, Targum partly coincides with the Midrash and adds that the wise must also pray for the world: "The sage *sees at beginning what will be in the end, and he prays and annuls the evil decrees from the world,* but the fool walks in darkness. And I also know *that if the sage does not pray and annul the evil decrees from the world when punishment comes upon the world,* one fate will befall all of them."[298] Therefore, the wisdom surely goes together with piety and virtue; otherwise, there is no advantage from it. Interpreting this verse Targum resorts to historical reality: "And I said in myself, like the fate of *King Saul who went astray in his rebellion and did not keep the commandment which had been commanded concerning Amalek and the kingdom was taken from him* also such will happen to me. Why am I, therefore, wiser than he? And I told myself that also this is vanity *and there is only the decree of the Memra of the Lord.*"[299] The Targum refers here to the events described in 1Sam.15. Saul was commanded to kill all the Amalekites. He, nevertheless, had not obeyed God and as a consequence later lost his kingdom. Targum draws parallels between Saul and Solomon. The targumic reading, however, concludes that, in contrast to Saul, Solomon is wiser because he has realized that keeping of God's commandments is man's all. Therefore, the Targum again asserts that wisdom coexists only with virtue and obedience of God.

The interpretation of the verse **7:23** in Qohelet Rabbah discusses the king's Solomon wisdom.[300] The main aim of the midrashic interpretation is to prove that Solomon was wiser man over other people. In order to develop this idea Qohelet Rabbah decides to comment simultaneously the fragment from 1Kings 4:29 – 34. In the beginning one can find a discussion between the Rabbis and rabbi Levi. Solomon wisdom is compared with the sand that is on the sea-shore (1Kings 4:29). The Rabbis consider that Solomon was given wisdom equal to that of all Israel. Rabbi Levi, nevertheless, said: "As the sand is fence to the sea, so was wisdom a fence to Solomon." Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the sons of the east, and all the wisdom in Egypt (1Kings 4:30). According to the Midrash, the sons of the east were skilled in astrology, divination with birds, and augury. The wisdom of Egypt is also astrology. While praising Solomon's wisdom, Qohelet Rabbah argues that he was wiser than all men (1Kings 4:31), wiser than Adam, Abraham, Moses, and Joseph. The Midrash provides commentary

[297] Ibid.
[298] Ibid.
[299] Ibid.
[300] For Hebrew text of interpretation see appendix 5.4.

practically to all these comparisons. Solomon composed three thousand proverbs (4:32). Nevertheless, according to rabbi Samuel ben Nahmani Solomon prophesied not more than eight hundred verses. It means that every verse composed by Solomon contains two or three meanings. Further the verse 4:33 *Also he spoke of trees, also of animals, of birds, of creeping things, and of fish* induces the Midrash to speak about instructions of the Torah on kosher and forbidden animals, birds, creeping things, and fish. Thus Qohelet Rabbah affirms that Solomon could explain all ordinances of the Torah. However, Qohelet's words remind that Solomon's wisdom is also limited. As a result the Midrash supposes that there is one direction of the Torah that is difficult also for Solomon. "Solomon said: Concerning all these ordinance of the Torah I have stood and investigated their meaning, but the chapter of the red heifer (Num.19) I have been unable to fathom. When I laboured therein and searched deeply into it, *I said: I will get wisdom, but it was far from me.*" According to Numbers 19, anyone who touches a corpse becomes ritually impure and must be purified by a specific ritual (i.e. must be sprinkled with the ashes of unblemished red heifer). For the rabbinic mind this commandment has no logical basis; Solomon could not understand it by his wisdom either. It is also possible that the Midrash does not agree with Qohelet's statement that wisdom is ultimately vain.[301] Therefore, the lack of understanding of some commandments is not evidence of the futility of wisdom. Thus, in this fragment Qohelet Rabbah unites interpretations of Qohelet's verse, the story about the king Solomon in the book of Kings, and several commandments of the Torah. This exegetical approach once again points to the unity of the biblical text.

Similarly to Qohelet Rabbah, Targum associates the wisdom with respect to understanding of the Torah: "All that, *I said,* I have tested with wisdom. I said *to myself,* I will be wise *also in all the wisdom of the Torah,* but it eluded me."[302] Therefore, the Torah and its commandments are not always understandable even for the wise man. Knowledge of the man is limited and cannot comprehend all God's mysteries.

Qohelet Rabbah comments separately the verse from the fragment **8:16f**.[303] While commenting the verse 8:16, Qohelet Rabbah pays attention to the words *for neither day nor night*

[301] R. Sandberg also points to this rabbinic conclusion (R. N. Sandberg, *Rabbinic Views of Qohelet,* 103-104).
[302] *The Targum Qohelet,* 40.
[303] For Hebrew text of interpretation see appendix 5.5.

do men see sleep with their eyes and understand this phrase as an allusion to the repentance.[304] A man neither sees repentance nor performs it. Continuing its allegorical interpretation, Qohelet Rabbah mentions two good things that are near man and at the same time far from him, i.e. repentance and death. Abraham Cohen offers following explanation of this rabbinic logic. Repentance is near because God is always ready to receive the penitent; it is far because the sinner hesitates to abandon his evil ways. Death is near when it is decreed by God, but it can be averted by good deeds; and when it is to take place in the distant future, wickedness can bring it near.[305] One can conclude that the Midrash wishes to say that if repentance is near, death is far and *vice versa*. If a man is pious and does good deeds – then death and evil are very far from him.

Interpretation of the next verse (**Qoh 8:17**) in Qohelet Rabbah is not connected with the previous one. The Midrash interprets the words *then I beheld all the works of God* as a reference to the understanding of the Torah: "Many have begged for ability to perform and to fathom the words of the Torah but have been unable to do so. Why?" Midrash finds the explanation of the cause in Qohelet's words *For though a man labours to discover it, yet he will not find it; moreover, though a wise man attempts to know it, he will not be able to find it.* According to the Midrash, this phrase also alludes to Solomon when he said that he could multiply wives without becoming an idol worshipper (1Kings 11:1 – 8). Solomon ignored the warning of Deut. 17:17 and married many wives and was therefore punished: his kingdom was taken away from his descendants (1Kings 11:9 – 13). Thus, even such a sage as Solomon can divert from God, fall in sin and idolatry – and as a consequence lose his wisdom. Thus, Qohelet Rabbah admits that wisdom is closely connected to sincere faith and devotion to God and His commandments.

The Targum also considers that Qohelet means here the study of the Torah: "Just I set my mind to know the wisdom *of the Torah* and to see the business which is done on the earth so *the sage who desire to occupy himself with the Torah and to find wisdom, it is labour, for he has no rest* in the day time and at night he sees no sleep with his eyes."[306] The study of the wisdom of the Torah is the main and hard work of the sage. In the next verse Targum sees an allusion to the knowledge of the future: "I saw every *mighty* work of the Lord *for it is awesome and a* man is not permitted to find out the *mighty work* of the Lord which is done *in this world* under the sun

[304] Cohen explains that midrash identifies the word *sleep* (*shenah*) with *shinui* "change" from evil to good, i.e. by means of penitence (*Midrash Rabbah. Ecclesiastes*, trans. A. Cohen, 223, ft. 4).
[305] Ibid., 224, ft.1.
[306] *The Targum Qohelet*, 43.

when a man labours to seek *what will be,* he shall not find out *and* also if a wise *man says to himself* that he will know *what will be at the end of days, he is not permitted* to find out." The Targum explains that a man cannot understand all works of God by means of his wisdom; he likewise cannot predict the future because it is forbidden for him. Therefore, human wisdom is futile only with regard to the comprehension of mysteries of divine world.

3.5.2. Interpretation of Didymus of Alexandria

The commentary of Didymus contains interpretations on the fragments 2:12 – 14 and 7:23. In the fragment **2:12 – 14** Didymus comments each verse separately. He pays attention rather to the words and phrases than to the meaning of the whole passage.[307] Unfortunately, the text contains some lacunas. Therefore, sometimes it is difficult to follow Didymus' train of thought. When speaking about the verse 2:12, Didymus explains why Qohelet decided to discover wisdom, madness, and folly at the same time. True knowledge presupposes the discovery of opposite phenomena. Therefore, a wise man discovers both good and evil, wisdom and folly, virtue and godlessness. This idea is somewhat parallel to Gregory's suggestion that it is necessary to inquire good and futile things by wisdom and knowledge. It is the way of intellect for the sake of knowledge.

Didymus considers necessary to explain various meanings of the word *what* (Greek τις). Didymus follows the variant of Septuagint, where a man will come not after a king (the Hebrew text), but after the purpose or intention (βουλη). The following interpretation is also depended on this reading. Didymus offers five types of meaning of the adjective and accompanies each with the quotation from the Holy Scripture. First, *what* can be instead of *no one.* For example, this is the situation in Rom.8:33 (*Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies*) and Rom.8:31 (*What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?*). This word (what) means also "rare," "infrequent" (e.g. Hos. 14:10: *Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them?* cf. Mt. 24:45 (*Who then is a faithful and wise servant*). Sometimes it indicates some impossible (Ps. 82:2)). It also denotes some individual person (Luke 19:12: *A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return*). Sometimes this adjective denotes also a question (e.g. Ps. 23:3: *Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord?* and Ps. 14:1 (*Lord, who may abide in Your*

[307] For Greek text of interpretation see appendix 5.6. (cf. Didymos der Blind, *Kommentar zum Ecclesiastes (Tyra-Papyrus)*, Teil I.1, ed. Gerhard Binder, Leo Liesenborghs, (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1979), 216-240).

tabernacle?)). Thus, in the process of commenting Qohelet, Didymus also decides to explain other verses from the Bible.

When discussing Septuagint's reading of Qohelet's verse, Didymus explains that the distinctive feature of a great man is his following a "purpose" (βουλη). In this case this word rather means "instruction of God." However, there are others who do not follow instructions and turn away from the Word of God. Here Didymus again quotes the Scripture as the evidence (Ps. 49:17: *Seeing you hate instruction And cast My words behind you?*). Didymus also shows that one can find such cases in history. For example, Pharaoh and his people devised a plot to decimate the Jews (Ex. 1:22). Nevertheless, they were unable to perform their intention (Ps. 20:12).

In his commentaries on the next verse Didymus affirms that wisdom has no syncretic connection with folly. Didymus explains Qohelet's comparison with light and darkness by the quotation from the Gospel: *and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil* (Joh3:19f). This text proves that wisdom is completely opposite to folly like light to darkness.

When discussing the verse that follows after this, Didymus supposes that the wise man who has eyes in his head is inward man (Rom. 7:22). Continuing this allegorical interpretation, which is based on the New Testament, the Church Farther offers allusion to Christ who is the head of every man (1Cor. 11:3). This interpretation is highly similar to Gregory's reading of this verse.

Unfortunately, Didymus's commentary does not contain interpretation of the last verse of this fragment. As a result, one can not analyze Didymus' reflections on the futility of the wisdom. However, on the basis of the abovementioned text one can see that Didymus does not attribute futile aspects to the wisdom, but highly values it.

At the beginning of the interpretation of the verse **7:23** Didymus follows literal reading of this verse.[308] Thus, Qohelet's wisdom was given to him by God. Qohelet was the sage, the teacher of sciences, who pronounced his words in the way it was useful to his pupils. Continuing his interpretation Didymus arrives from literal reading to the discussion that seemingly does not deal with Qohelet's words. Qohelet's proof by wisdom induces Didymus to speak about the essence of intellectual experience. The intellectual experience includes experimental

[308] For Greek text of interpretation see appendix 5.7. (cf. Didymos der Blind, *Kommentar zum Ecclesiastes (Tyra-Papyrus)*, Teil IV, ed. Johannes Kramer, Baerbel Krebber (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1972), 90-96).

argumentation and conclusion that makes discussion possible. True discussion presupposes the consideration of arguments pro and contra. For example, if one speaks about the richness good or evil, then he examines arguments that justify richness and deny it. Thus, conclusion is experimental because it is carried out from experiment. Therefore, according to Didymys' logic, Qohelet's wisdom is perfect because in his experience he follows this approach. Didymus only briefly comments on Qohelet's conclusion that wisdom is far from him. Here Didymus apparently does not agree with Qohelet and thinks that this Qohelet's idea is erroneous.

3.5.3. Interpretation of Gregory of Nyssa

Commenting the verse **1:13** Gregory pays special attention to the subject that Qohelet investigated by his wisdom.[309] At the beginning of his interpretation Gregory introduces the concept of incarnation and understands the verses 1:13 – 15 as the reason and the aim of incarnation. One of the reasons of the Lord's fleshly coming is investigation of all that is done under heaven. According to Gregory the words *all that is done under heaven* mean here the evils on the earth. The Lord is coming to seek evil and to overcome it. In order to explain what is evil on the earth Gregory refers to Gen. 3 and mentions the image of a creeping animal, the serpent as reason of worldly evil and sin. Therefore, the Lord's fleshly coming is connected with the victory over the original sin and the birth of new Adam. In this way Gregory develops the idea of cosmological soteriology.[310]

Gregory further decides to examine the nature of evil. The part of the creation below heaven was brought low through evil and now futility rules on the earth. However, evil is unreal, it has no substance, since it takes its substance from what does not exist. Thus, taking into account this fact, Gregory affirms here that it is not correct to understand Qohelet's words literally. It does not mean that God gave evil distress to men, and responsibility for sin would be laid on him. Gregory sees the explanation of Qohelet's expression in the concept of free will. The good gift of God (i.e. freedom of action) became a means to sin through the sinful use mankind made of it. The choice of evil became a source of distress for the soul. A man who erroneously uses God's good gifts serves the evil. However, a man is good by nature is surely the producer of all good. Gregory explains that here Qohelet does not contradict himself. In his opinion it is normal for the Holy Scripture to express ideas of this kind in such a language (e.g.

[309] For Greek text of interpretation see appendix 5.8. (cf. *In Ecclesiastes*, 637-640).
[310] E. Muehlenberg suggests that Gregory was influenced here by Origen's teaching of soteriology. Commentary on this homily see in Ekkehard Muehlenberg, *Homilie II. Eccl 1,12-2,3*, in Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on Ecclesiastes*, 164.

God gave them up to shameful passions (Rom. 1:26), and *He gave them up to depraved reason* (Rom. 1:28), and *He hardened Pharaoh's heart* (Ex. 9:12)).

When concluding his interpretation, Gregory again reminds that God is not the cause of futility, but the choice made by human impulse, free will. Thus, by using Qohelet's text, Gregory introduces the main theological and ethical theme of the second homily. All previous and following fragments of this homily are closely related with the abovementioned ideas.

After extensive theological reflections Gregory decides to offer word-by-word interpretation of the fragment **1:16 – 18**. The main theme of this commentary is the efforts of acquiring wisdom.[311] Solomon has become greater among all who were before him, and he exceeded them in wisdom. Wisdom and knowledge that Solomon saw by his heart did not come in their own accord; he acquired them with efforts. Gregory asserts that using the language of analogy, Qohelet by knowledge means here the grasp of transcendent. The Lord in the Gospel in a similar manner introduces the message about the kingdom with visual image, when speaking about a pearl, or treasure, or wedding. Further Gregory again emphasizes the close connection between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge is produced from wisdom, and knowledge makes easier the discernment of what is beyond us. This does not simply happen without effort to those who pursue it, but the person who increases his knowledge exactly matches effort to learning. Acquirement of the wisdom and knowledge of transcendent is a very hard work, therefore, Qohelet concluded that one who increases knowledge will increase pain. Thus, in the interpretation of this verse Gregory does not agree with the biblical text and denies that wisdom is futile. On the contrary, he emphasizes the greatness of wisdom and knowledge of truth, even if the process of its acquirement can lead to pain.

At the beginning of the interpretation of the passage **2:12 – 15** Gregory specifies what human wisdom is.[312] In his opinion, Qohelet teaches what is the essence of human wisdom. According to Gregory's reading of Qohelet, the real wisdom (which he also calls "counsel") brings about what truly is and has substance, and is not thought of among futile things. To follow this – is the sum of human wisdom. But real wisdom is none other than the Wisdom which is conceived of as before the universe. It is that wisdom by which God made all things.[313] As

[311] For Greek text of interpretation see appendix 5.9. (cf. *In Ecclesiastes*, 644-645).
[312] For Greek text of interpretation see appendix 5.10. (cf. *In Ecclesiastes*, 680-686).
[313] R.E. Heine draws attention to the fact that instead of Septuagint verse όσα εποιησεν αυτην "he has made her" Gregory writes όσα εποιησεν αυτη "she (obviously counsel) has made so many things". The significant difference is the

evidence of this suggestion Gregory quotes at the same time the Old and the New Testament *by wisdom You made all things* (Ps 104:24), and *Christ is the power and the wisdom of God* (1Cor 1:24). It is not a coincidence that Gregory quotes both Testaments and blends wisdom and Christ. He demonstrates that Logos (Christ) also too part in the process of creation. Further Gregory concludes that if the deeds of Wisdom are immortality, blessedness of soul, courage, justice, prudence, then human wisdom is to have pondered these true deeds. Therefore, Gregory's reading of Qohelet's words is allegorical: he speaks of wisdom as God's agent in creation. This interpretation is also Christiological: Gregory identifies God's real wisdom, i.e. His creative agent, with Christ to whom human wisdom should follow.

Continuing interpretation of this verse, Gregory explains that by comparing wisdom and folly with light and darkness Qohelet embraces all good in the word *wisdom* and includes the nature of evil in his understanding of *folly*. Gregory again returns to the abovementioned theme of the nature of evil and explains that evil, similarly to darkness, is in its own nature unreal. Evil does not exist by itself, but arises from the deprivation of good. Thus, one can see how skillfully Gregory unites allegorical, ethical and Christological interpretations of one Qohelet's verse.

Further interpreting the verse 2:14, Gregory draws an analogy between the eyes of the wise and the soul. As in the bodily conformation the part which projects from the rest is called a head, so in the soul the leading and foremost part is presumed to act as a head. After this Gregory smoothly goes to Christological interpretation and by quoting 1Cor 11:3 affirms that Christ is the head of everyone. The one who is in light can not see darkness; therefore, the one who has his eye in Christ cannot fix it on anything futile. In addition, Gregory again touches upon the question of the difference between the good and evil. Gregory elucidates what it means to walk in darkness by an allusion to the words of Jesus about putting the lamp on a lampstand (Mt 5:15; Mk 4:21; Luke 11:33). The one who does not display his light on a lampstand, but puts it in underneath of the bed, makes light into darkness. In this way he becomes a manufacturer of the unreal – and the unreal is futile. Thus, darkness is equivalent in meaning to futility. One can conclude here that in the interpretation of this verse Gregory includes also the reflection on the nature of futility.

When speaking about the abovementioned verse, Gregory bases his interpretation on Septuagint's reading (εγω τοτε περισσον ελαλησα εν καρδια μου διοτι αφρων εκ περισσευματος

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change of the pronoun from the accusative to the nominative. Therefore counsel in Gregory's reading is maker. Probably Gregory knew the text of Septuagint that had this reading (cf. Ronald E. Heine, *Exegesis and Theology in Gregory of Nyssa's Fifth Homily on Ecclesiastes,* 201-202).

λαλει) that adds several words to the Hebrew text and to some extent changes the meaning of Qohelet's words. Gregory argues that Qohelet indeed condemns his objection as superfluous and illogical, and calls the argument foolish, because it is not from the treasuries of wisdom. Gregory concludes that citing the words without sense is futile activity. Thus, according to Gregory's reading, wisdom does not have futile aspects because of its limitedness and inevitable death of a wise man. Nevertheless, man himself can turn his wisdom into vain doing evil deeds and speaking futile and foolish words. Therefore, true human wisdom has nothing in common with futility.

3.5.4. Interpretation of Jerome

Commenting the verse **1:13** Jerome pays attention to the meaning of Hebrew words and their different Greek translations.[314] To give an example, he examines the word . According to the translations of Septuagint, Aquila, and Theodotion it means "distraction" (περισπασμος) because distractions and anxiety tear human mind. Symmachus translated it as "occupation" (ασχολιαν). Jerome, however, prefers to determine the meaning himself and affirms that translation of this significant word must conform to its meaning in the Book of Qohelet. So, Qohelet commended his mind to the investigation of wisdom in order to know the causes and reasons. Do some events happen by accident or according to disposition of God? People try to grasp what is not permitted them to know. This superfluous occupation and agonizing desire are given by God.

Jerome further suggests to understand Qohelet's text in the light of the New Testament and quotes some verses from Apostle Paul's epistles (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28; 2Th. 2:11: *Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts; to vile passions; and God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; God will send them strong delusion*). Basing his interpretation on the abovementioned text, Jerome supposes that God gave people evil distraction because they by their will and arbitrary rule have done something wrong. Therefore, people received this hard task as a punishment for wrong use of free will given by God. Thus, one can conclude that Jerome does not suggest that wisdom is futile. Nevertheless, it is evident from this interpretation that incorrect investigation of wisdom leads to futility.

[314] For Latin text of interpretation see appendix 5.11. (cf. *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten,* 1073).

Speaking about the verse **1:18**[315] Jerome supposes that a wise man is indignant with the fact that by increasing the wisdom he is under commandment of vice and is far from virtue. Who increases wisdom, increases also grief, because he grieves over his sins. It happens because strong people will endure great sorrow, and one who is charged with great deeds is also made to answer for it.

Without this interpretation Jerome sees another meaning in Qohelet's words. A wise man grieves because wisdom is hidden in the distance, and it is reached only by torment, intolerable work and studies. One can suppose that Jerome's reading is to some extent similar to the midrashic idea about the responsibility of wise man for his wisdom and knowledge. The suffering and responsibility of wise man are greater than of ignorant man.

In the passage on **Qoh 2:12 – 15** Jerome comments each verse separately.[316] Jerome does not agree with Septuagint's translation of the verse 2:12. Iin his opinion the sense of Qohelet's words does not coincide with the Greek variant. Jerome offers his own translation on which the following interpretation is based. According to Jerome's reading, the king mentioned in the Hebrew text is also the Creator. Jerome retells Qohelet's experience and puts his own interpretation in Qohelet's mouth. Thus, Qohelet denies pleasure and returns to the investigation of wisdom. Alas, he finds in it delusion and folly instead of true vision. It means that a man cannot clearly comprehend the Wisdom of his Creator and King. Therefore, the fact that a man knows is rather conjecture and supposition than truth and real knowledge. If we turn to the abovementioned rabbinic interpretation of this verse, we will see the parallel. Both sources understand the king as God and speak about human inability to comprehend God's works.

In the following verse Jerome continues the previous theme. He adds that in spite of the limitedness of human wisdom there is as great difference between wisdom and folly as between day and night, light and darkness. His interpretation of verse 2:14 agrees with Didymus' and Gregory's commentaries. These three sources see in Qohelet's text allusion to Christ as the head of each man. One who will become perfect will have Christ as his head and will turn his eyes to Christ, i.e. to heavenly and not to earthly.

Jerome, as well Gregory, in his commentaries on the last verse of this passage agrees with Septuagint's reading. This means that when speaking about similar fate of wise and fool, Qohelet recognizes his previous opinion unreasonable. Qohelet understood that he was mistaken

[315] For Latin text of interpretation see appendix 5.12. (cf. *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten,* 1075-1076).
[316] Latin text of interpretation see appendix, 5.13. (cf. *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten,* 1082-1083).

and his view was vain because the end of wise and fool will not be similar: the first will receive reward and the other will receive punishment. Therefore, according to Jerome, human wisdom is not vain in spite of its imperfection. It excels folly and there will be remembrance of wise man. This conclusion is also similar to the midrasic interpretation that a wise will live in memory of others.

Jerome offers three brief interpretations of **Qoh 7:23f**.[317] The first interpretation is historical. Jerome refers to the book of Kings (1King 3; 4) and narrates the story about the king Solomon who sought for wisdom – and the more he sought, the less he found it. As a result, he plunged into darkness and ignorance. The second interpretation speaks about a man who studies the Holy Scripture. The more he will be competent in his study, the more he will find out an obscurity. In the last, the third interpretation, Jerome understands Qohelet's words in the light of 1Cor. 13:12. Jerome again (cf. interpretation of 2:1, 6:11f) contrasts the knowledge of truth in material world with the knowledge which a Christian shall receive in heaven. The contemplation of wisdom in this life is not perfect, but in the future the wisdom will be revealed to man completely, *face to face* – as Apostle Paul has said. Thus, one can see how smoothly Jerome goes from literal historical interpretation to the allegorical and then to the spiritual. Speaking about parallels, one can notice that Qohelet Rabbah, in its interpretation of this verse, also mentions the king Solomon. Targum Qohelet, however, sees here an allusion to the study of the Torah.

Jerome's interpretation of Qoh. **8:16f** is literal; he merely in detail retells Qohelet's experience.[318] One, who discovers reasons and causes of things, suffers from his investigations and does not comprehend what he has studied. Therefore, human mind is unable to understand why one was born blind and weak while another was born sighted and healthy; why one was born poor while another is rich, why one is of noble birth while another is not, etc. If one says that he has known those things, he is mistaken because the causes of things are concealed and cannot be comprehended by the people. Therefore, Jerome agrees with Qohelet that human wisdom is limited and wise man will not try to grasp what is not permitted. In earlier interpretations Jerome also noticed that a man (be he the wisest of all) cannot understand all the laws of the universe.

[317] For Latin text of interpretation see appendix 5.14. (cf. *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten,* 1124).
[318] For Latin text of interpretation see appendix 5.15. (cf. *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten,* 1134-1135).

3.5.5. Comparison

Now we can sum up what rabbinic and patristic sources understand by the wisdom and its connection to futility. Both the Midrash Qohelet Rabbah and Targum Qohelet agree that the author of the book of Qohelet is the king Solomon. Therefore, they often interpret the abovementioned verses in the light of biblical passages that tell about Solomon's wisdom.

For the Rabbis the study of the Torah is the main task of faithful men. It is not surprising then that the Midrash Qohelet Rabbah and Targum frequently associate wisdom with the study of the Torah. In their opinion, a man learns the Torah, but forgets it. It seems that the pursuit of the Torah knowledge is sore and futile task since a man cannot remember what he learns because of his imperfect memory. However, the Midrash explains this contradiction and denies the futility of wisdom. It is for man's good that he learns the Torah and forgets it. If a man studied the Torah and never forgot it, he would occupy himself with learning it for two or three years; then he would resume his ordinary work and never pay further attention to it. But since a man studies the Torah and forgets it, he will not entirely abandon its study

When speaking about human wisdom, Qohelet Rabbah touches upon the question of responsibility of the wise for his knowledge. A man who feeds his mind with much learning and knowledge, suffers more than an ignorant man. Furthermore, his responsibility is greater. Therefore, wisdom is given by God and a man must understand the significance of this gift.

Qohelet Rabbah does not speak openly about futile aspect of the wisdom mentioned by Qohelet. It only agrees with Qohelet in his conclusion that a man can not comprehend by his wisdom God's action and all mysteries of the nature. Nevertheless, Qohelet Rabbah does not affirm that this inability is futile. In its opinion, the lack of understanding of some of the Torah's commandments is not an evidence of the vanity of the wisdom either. On the contrary, the wisdom, like the words of the Torah, is light for a man. A wise will avoid vanity, twaddle and heresy. The wisdom is also closely connected with sincere faith and devotion to God and His commandments.

Didymus' commentary does not discuss the theme of the futility of wisdom. While speaking about wisdom Didymus emphasizes that wisdom is connected with virtue because a wise man follows instructions of God. Furthermore, according to Didymus Christ is the head of a wise man. When taking into these ideas, one can conclude that for Didymus wisdom has nothing in common with futility.

While commenting the abovementioned verses, Gregory also frequently refers Qohelet's text to the experience of the king Solomon. Gregory emphasizes the close connection between knowledge and wisdom. He asserts that using the language of analogy, Qohelet means by knowledge the grasp of transcendent. Knowledge is produced from wisdom, and knowledge makes easier the discernment of what is beyond us. This does nor simply happen without effort to those who pursue it. Furthermore, the person who increases his knowledge exactly matches effort to learning.

Gregory also specifies what is human wisdom. Human wisdom must follow the real wisdom and ponder the true works of it. However, real wisdom is none other than the Wisdom which is conceived of as before the universe. It is that wisdom by which God made all things. Gregory identifies God's real wisdom, His creative agent with Christ to whom human wisdom should follow. Gregory also does not agree that wisdom has some futile aspects in spite of its limitedness and inevitable death of wise man. He think, nevertheless, that man himself can turn his wisdom in vain by speaking futile and foolish words.

Like other commentators, Jerome also resorts to Solomonic interpretation. Solomon sought for wisdom, and the more he sought, the less he found it. As a result, he and plunged into darkness and ignorance. In his interpretation Jerome often returns to the theme of the limitedness of human wisdom. A wise man cannot grasp the cause of all things because it is not permitted to him. Jerome also sees big differences between imperfect human wisdom in this earthly life and absolute knowledge of wisdom in the World to Come. However, in worldly reality a man can also become perfect if he will have Christ, God's Wisdom, as his head. Therefore, according to Jerome, in spite of its imperfection, human wisdom is not vain, because it excels folly.

Having discussed the similarities between rabbinic and patristic sources, we can notice numerous parallels in the rabbis' and Jerome's interpretation of Qohelet. To give an example, they share the same comparison of the king with God (Qoh 2:12) and allusion to the study of the Holy Scripture. Furthermore, both Rabbis and Church Fathers do not agree with Qohelet that human wisdom, its limitedness notwithstanding, is in some extent connected with vanity.

In the abovementioned disagreement with Qohelet's opinion one can again see the common process of reinterpretation of the text. While rewriting the text both Jewish and Christian exegetes struggle against Qohelet's pessimism and identify the wisdom with spiritual values of their faith and tradition. According to Jewish and Christian theology the source of human wisdom is found in the Divine Wisdom. Therefore, if wisdom is represented as the Torah

or Christ it cannot have anything common with futile reality. Thus, rabbinic and patristic sources again have changed Qohelet's reflections by using spiritualization of the text. By offering this reinterpretation the commentaries have made Qohelet's text acceptable for their respective religious teaching and tradition.

3.6. Human life is *hebel*

Qoh. 3:19. For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all is vanity.

In the verse 3:19 Qohelet concludes that both human beings and animals have similar fate ( ), they are mortal and have one breath ( ). Furthermore, death comes close to everybody, and therefore a man has no advantage ( ) over animals. Here the word *Ruah* means "life."[319] Breath means at the same time life and death (or fate) of humans and animals, who, in Qohelet's opinion, share the same life and death. This is why Qohelet doubts immortality of soul in the afterworld (3:21).[320] This injustice motivates Qohelet to conclude that all in this world (human beings and animals) are *hebel*: vapor, vanity, emptiness.[321] In this verse *hebel* also means "absurd" – because transience arouses absurdity.[322] In order to emphasize the metaphoric meaning of *hebel* Qohelet used antonym *motar* and synonym [323]: *all are from the dust, and all return to dust* (3:20).

Qoh. 6:12 For who knows what is good for man in life, all the days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow? Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun?

Qoh. 9:9 Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in the labour which you perform under the sun.

The following verses (6:12; 9:9) are very similar thematically. Here *hebel*[324] most probably denotes human life in general. Qohelet describes it like something ephemeral and

[319] R. Gordis, *Koheleth*, 238.
[320] C.L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 175.
[321] R.B. Scott, *Proverbs. Ecclesiastes*, 222-223.
[322] M. Fox, "The Meaning of *Hebel* for Qohelet," 421.
[323] D. B. Miller, "Qohelet's Symbolic Use of ," 447.
[324] Qohelet uses *hebel* with second and third person suffix: *heblo, hebleha.*

transient.[325] For example, in the verse 6:12 synonym (shadow) indicates the metaphorical meaning of *hebel.* [326]

Qoh. 11:9f Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, And let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; Walk in the ways of your heart, And in the sight of your eyes; But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from your heart, And put away evil from your flesh, For childhood and youth are vanity.

In the fragment 11:9f Qohelet gives a young man an advice to enjoy the youth. Later, however, he describes the youth as *hebel.* In this case it may mean that the life (including youth) are ephemeral and transient.[327] Fox supposes that this passage contains also connotation of absurdity because the youth like also the wisdom is absurd on account of its transience. [328]

3.6.1. Interpretation of Midrash Qohelet Rabbah

Qohelet Rabbah offers three symbolic interpretations of the verse **3:18f**. At the same time it changes the primary meaning of the biblical text.[329] The Midrash does not agree with Qohelet that all men are beasts and, therefore, compares only wicked men with animals. According to rabbinic view, Qohelet speaks about the manner in which the wicked conduct themselves in this world. They revile and blaspheme in this world. However, in the same way that a beast is condemned to death and does not enter the life of the World to Come, so are the wicked condemned to the death like a beast and do not enter the World to Come. Thus, here the Midrash, in contrast to Qohelet, confirms that only righteous, who does not sin, receives life in the afterworld and immortality.[330]

In the second interpretation the comparison with the beast has positive connotation. First, the *sons of men* refer to the righteous; the manner in which they conduct themselves in this world is privation, fasting, and sufferings. The righteous should recognize and demonstrate to the

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[325] R.B. Scott, *Proverbs. Ecclesiastes*, 233, 236, 245; M. Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 43; D. B. Miller, "Qohelet's Symbolic Use of ," 448; C.L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 242, 252, 302. Fox, however, affirms that Qohelet means rather absurd life than transient (M. Fox, "The Meaning of *Hebel* for Qohelet," 421).

[326] Similar examples are found also in the others books of the Old Testament (Job 14:2; 1King 29:15; Ps. 102:2, 109:23, 144:4). (C.L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 242; D. B. Miller, "Qohelet's Symbolic Use of ," 448).

[327] E. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*, 181; R.B. Scott, *Proverbs. Ecclesiastes*, 253; C.L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 371; D. B. Miller, "Qohelet's Symbolic Use of ," 448.

[328] M. Fox, "The Meaning of *Hebel* for Qohelet," 421.

[329] For Hebrew text of interpretation see appendix 6.1.

[330] Ruth Sandberg shows parallel idea in Genesis Rabbah 8:11 – "God creates a man with something of the nature of nature of angels and animals. If he sins he will die like beast. If he does not sin he will live like angel" (R. N. Sandberg, *Rabbinic Views of Qohelet*, 137).

peoples of the world how Israel is drawn after God like a beast which follows its owner, as it is said *You are My flock, the flock of My pasture; you are men, and I am your God," says the Lord God* (Eze 34:31). Seeing Israel as the beast, sheep of God, the Midrash denies disparagement of humanity expressed by Qohelet.

The third interpretation tries to see some similarity between humans and animals because both are creatures of God. Quoting God's decrees in Lev. 12:3 and Lev. 22:27 Qohelet Rabbah demonstrates this similarity. Just as human males are to be circumcised on the eight day, so too also animals are offered only after eight days of life. This interpretation does not disparage humans, but demonstrates that all in the world is creature of God that lives according to His obedience.

However, concluding the interpretation, the Midrash comes back to the idea of the difference between a man and beast. God ordained burial, coffin and shrouds for man, but did not do it for animals. Therefore, humans are not similar to beast and their deaths are different. Man's superiority over the animals consists in the manner of disposing the body after death.

The reading of the Targum is similar to the abovementioned midrashic interpretations. "For the fate *of guilty people and the fate of the unclean* beast is the same for *all* of them. And as for *an unclean* beast dies, so dies *the one who does not turn in repentance before his death.* And the life breath of *both of them is judged alike in all respects.* And as for superiority *of a guilty* man over the *unclean beast,* there is no distinction *between the one and the other except the burial place.*"[331] Similarly to Qohelet Rabbah and Genesis Rabbah, Targum also affirms that the wicked man is like a beast, because his sins do not allow him to enter the afterworld. However, in contrast to the beasts, even a guilty man is buried after the death.

Qohelet Rabbah offers three brief interpretations on the verse **6:12**.[332] The first explanation is practically identical with the interpretation on the verse 1:2. The commentary is put in Solomon's and David's mouth. Quoting the words of Psalm 144:4 the Midrash compares humanity to the vapor, breath, to the steam from oven. However, there is a substance in the steam, while human life is utterly vain.

The second interpretation gives the answer to Qohelet's question *who knows that is good for man in his vain life?* Since the days of man's life are vain, few in number, and like a shadow,

[331] *The Targum of Qohelet*, 30.
[332] For Hebrew text of interpretation see appendix 6.2.

what benefit has he from his existence? The Midrash gives advice to a man to seek consolation in the Torah and to occupy himself with words of the Torah which are all of life. Therefore, Qohelet Rabbah again returns to the abovementioned idea that only the Torah and its study can help man to overcome the vanity of his existence.

In the last interpretation the Midrash decides to look for an answer to Qohelet's question in the book itself or to interpret one biblical verse by another. Solomon said: I will tell you what is best of all, *the good name is better than a precious oil* (7:1). By offering this reading the Rabbis most probably simply wanted to unite two chapters (6 and 7) of the book and smoothly go to the next interpretation.

The reading of Targum Qohelet is very similar to the second midrashic interpretation of this verse. "For who is the one who knows that will be good for man *in this world, except to occupy himself with the Torah which is the life of the world* and the whole number of days of his futile life *which he lives, at the time of his death is considered in his eyes* liked a shadow. For who is he that will be *at his end in this world* under the sun".[333] Thus, the only aim and sense of human life is the Torah that at the same time is the life of the world. And by the study of the Torah man can cut himself of futility of his days.

Interpretation of the verse **9:9** consists of three parts. Each of them offers different explanation of the words *Enjoy life with the wife whom you love*.[334] The first interpretation is symbolic because the wife is associated with the Torah. Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi said: "Acquire a handicraft for yourself together with Torah."[335] To give an example, rabbi Jose ben Meshullam and rabbi Simeon ben Menasia divided the day into three parts – one third for the Torah, one third for prayer, and one third for work.

The next interpretation discusses the mourning for a wife. In spite of the fact that Qohelet Rabbah is aggadic, the Midrash introduces the halakhic subject and explains it by Qohelet's verse. One who mourns the death of his wife is forbidden to remarry until thirty days have elapsed. Rabbi Judah says: Until three Festivals (Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles) have passed, one after another, corresponding to the three occurrences of the word *life* in this verse.

[333] *The Targum of Qohelet*, 37.
[334] For Hebrew text of interpretation see appendix 6.3.
[335] Cohen notices that Qohelet Rabbah was most probably influenced here by Mishnah's treatise Kid. 30b "Excellent is the study of Torah together with a worldly occupation" (*Midrash Rabbah. Ecclesiastes*, trans. A. Cohen, 236, ft. 2).

However, if he is childless or if his children are young, he is permitted to remarry without this interval.

In the third interpretation the Midrash says that a man who has no wife lives without good, help, joy, blessing, and atonement.[336] For each of the abovementioned goods Qohelet Rabbah offers evidence from the other verses of the Old Testament. "Without good. How do we know it? *It is not good that the man should be alone* (Gen. 2:18). Help. How do we know it? *I will make a help meet for him* (ibid.). Joy. How do we know it? *and you shall rejoice, you and your household.* Blessing. How do we know it? *to cause a blessing to rest on your house* (Eze. 44:30). Atonement. How do we know it? *and make atonement for himself and for his house* (Lev. 16:6). Rabbi Joshua ben Levi says: He also lives without life, as it is stated *Enjoy life with the wife whom you love.*"[337] Thus, Qohelet Rabbah affirms that life firstly without the study of the Torah and secondly without the wife is utterly vain and senseless.

In contrast to the Midrash, Targum Qohelet offers a literal reading of the verse. "Have *a good* life with your wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which the Lord gave you *by your providence.* For it is your portion in your life and in your labour wherein you labour *in this world* under the sun".[338] Targum introduces such a new term as *mazal* (providence) and frequently uses it. Usually God determines *mazal* (5:18, 6:2; 10:6); good *mazal* is a reward given to deserving people (5:17). However, sometimes *mazal* is used to describe inescapable fate; therefore, a man cannot change his *mazal* (9:11).[339]

At the beginning of the interpretation of the verse **11:9**[340] Qohelet Rabbah discusses the question of canonicity of the book of Qohelet because Qohelet's words *walk in the ways of your heart* contradict to the teaching of the Torah and therefore can be understood as heretical. The Midrash narrates: "The Sages sought to suppress the Book of Qohelet because they discovered therein words which tend towards heresy." According to Moses' advice *You seek not after your own heart* (Num. 15:39). However Solomon continued *But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment,* and the sages exclaimed "well has Solomon spoken". Therefore, in the opinion of Rabbis the last words save the book of Qohelet from a charge of heresy.

[336] Here Qohelet Rabbah is influenced by Yeb. 62b.
[337] *Midrash Rabbah. Ecclesiastes,* 236.
[338] *The Targum of Qohelet,* 45.
[339] For more details, see ibid. 29, note 11.
[340] For Hebrew text of interpretation, see appendix 6.4.

The following interpretation consists of several brief *mashalim* (parables) which explain concluding phrase of this verse (*But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment*). Obviously, the Midrash wishes to emphasize that the verse does not call to the enjoyment of youth, but warns about the retribution of God for man's sin. For example, the Midrash says in the name of rabbi Hiyya Rabbah: It may be linked to a man fled from the executioner, he ran away and the executioner ran after him. But he can not escape and his running away is futile. Similarly it is stated, *But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment.* The other parable resorts to the images and tell about a wicked person who indulges in the good things of this world. So, rabbi Levi said: it may be linked to a bird shut up in a cage. Another bird came and said to it, Happy are you, for see how your food is provided for you! It replied, May you be unlucky and unfortunate! You consider my food but pay no attention to my being shut up; tomorrow they will take me out and slay me. Similarly it is stated, *But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment.* Therefore, Qohelet Rabbah wishes to say that fools look only to temporary prosperity of wicked, but not to his fate afterwards. By quoting those parables Qohelet Rabbah argues that God's judgment of transgression is inevitable.

The next interpretation reads the text symbolically. Qohelet Rabbah sees in Qohelet's words the allusion to the Holy Tradition. So, rabbi Judah said: *In youth,* it means it in the Torah which you studied in your youth; *And let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth* (*adolescence*), i.e. the Mishnah;[341] *walk in the ways of your heart,* i.e. Talmud.[342] *But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment,* i.e. precepts and good deeds.[343] Another interpretation suggests that the ways of heart are the learning which one derived from his teacher. Everyone who studies the Torah should follow tradition and established custom. Therefore, in Rabbis' opinion, the true life enjoyment is the study of the written and the oral Torah (i.e. the Talmud) and observance of God's instruction. Sinful behavior leads life to vanity.

Targum Qohelet adds clarifications to the Hebrew text. "Rejoice, O Youth, *in the days of* your youth and let your heart be glad in the days of your boyhood and walk, *humbly* in the ways of your heart *and be careful of* the vision of your eyes *that you do not look at evil and it be* known to you that for these things the Lord will bring you to judgment. And remove anger from

[341] Cohen comments that adolescence indicates here the higher branch of study, viz. Mishnah (*Midrash Rabbah. Ecclesiastes,* trans. A. Cohen, 296, ft. 3).
[342] Because the study of Talmud demands the application of the heart (ibid. 296, ft. 3).
[343] Because one who studies Torah without carrying out the precepts and allowing them to control his conduct will be punished (ibid. 297, ft. 1).

your heart and do not cause of evil to your flesh for youth and the days of blackness of hair are vanity."[344] Thus Targum does not deny the ways of heart and eyes if they are humble and careful. Another version of Targum Qohelet offers more extensive reading of the verse and explains what happens if a man follows anger. "Remove anger from your heart *for anger kills people and furthermore, it brings down many to Gehena, but as for you, it is proper to save yourself from the judgment of Gehena and know that all of this world is considered* vanity *and nothing remains to a man of all his works except the good deeds which shield him and also benefit him in the world to come.*" It is important to notice here that the Targum develops here the idea of hell which is absent in the Hebrew text. Second, in contrast to Qohelet, who speaks in this verse about the transience of the youth, the Targum affirms that all in this world is vanity except for good deeds. Thus, the place in the world to come is a reward for the good deeds that a man has done on earth.

3.6.2. Interpretation of Didymus of Alexandria

Qohelet's comparison of sons of men with animals in **3:19** motivates Didymus to begin the discussion of similarity of human nature with angels and animals.[345] The animals are mortal and unreasonable beings, but the angels are immortal and reasonable. Thus, both the natures of angels and animals are united in a man. It is interesting that Didymus' thought has a parallel with the abovementioned phrase in Genesis Rabbah 8:11: "God creates a man with something of the nature of angels and animals".

Further Didymus demonstrates to his listeners that in contrast to unreasonable beings human soul can become perfect and similar to God. Here Didymus was most probably influenced by Plato. In Didymus' opinion, by similar fate that happens to sons of men and animals Qohelet means only the death of body and does not speak about reason. Continuing his interpretation Didymus deviates from the literal meaning of Qohelet's text and affirms that a man, similarly to angels, can go to heaven and stay there or, on the contrary, be condemned. This, however, does not happen to animals. Didymus also demonstrates the difference between the death of men and animals. When a man dies, his soul separates from the body and continues his existence. The death of animals, however, destroys the soul together with flesh. Thus, by this interpretation Didymus casts away Qohelet's doubts of afterlife of human soul. Further Didyms

[344] *The Targum of Qohelet*, 52.
[345] For Greek text of interpretation, see appendix 6.5. (Cf. Didymos der Blind, *Kommentar zum Ecclesiastes (Tyra-Papyrus)*, Teil II, ed. Michael Gronewald (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1977), 150-164).

notices that in the last sentence of this verse Qohelet speaks only about the breath that is common to the peoples and animals. There is no allusion here to the soul, mind and spirit. However, with regard to a physical condition, a man has no advantage over animals because both people and animals see, hear, group, taste, and smell. When speaking about the concept of *hebel*, Didymus explains that Qohelet does not speak here about substantial vanity because the death does not destroy a man and does not turn him into nothing. Vanity rather denotes here that all is changeable and inconstant, and so the man thinks that he has no advantage over the animals.

Commenting the verse **6:12** Didymus in detail explains why the days of human life are shadow and vanity.[346] To show a parallel to Qohelet's words, Didymus quotes Job 8:9 *Because our days on earth are a shadow.* Further he specifies that earthly material life is shadow only in comparison to excellent heavenly life. Apostle Paul likewise points to the shadowy life *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable* (1Cor. 15:19). The one who understands that this life is shadowy must content himself with it, occupy himself with it as with changeable thing and think that another life will follow after shadowy life. In the following Qohelet's question *Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun?* Didymus sees an allusion to the sun of righteous that shines in the kingdom of Father (Mat. 13:43). In Didymus' opinion Qohelet speaks here also about the will of God. We do not know the will of God because it is inscrutable depth (Rom. 11:33). However, in spite of incomprehension of God's judgment and ways, a man must disregard temporary and visible things. Then he will follow God and will know the transcendence that is connected with the life after death.

Further in the text follows the question from audience concerning the allegorical meaning of *shadowy life.* Didymus answers that shadowy days are the days of our fleshly life because we know the truth in part (1Cor.13:9) and the perfection does not yet come. Didymus also demonstrates another example from the Old Testament. The Jews were in the day of shadow; nevertheless, Moses explained the excellent meaning of the true days when he said *for He is your life and the length of your days* (Deut. 30:20). The love for God with all heart and soul (Deut. 6:5) does not cause an increase of earthly days. Frequently many pious people have quickly lost their life while many bad people have lived a long time.

Further the listeners do not content themselves with the answer and ask again about an allegorical meaning. Didymus offers two types of reading which are based on the interpretation

[346] For Greek text of interpretation see appendix 6.6. (cf. Didymos der Blind, *Kommentar zum Ecclesiastes (Tyra-Papyrus)*, Teil III, 80-87).

of the words *under the sun*. The sun (light) of the truth leads up a man from the shadow and temporary thing and brings him to the eternity. The second interpretation demonstrates the change of the state of pious man. Now he is at the way to the righteousness. But then (in the following life) he will go out this state and will not be under the sun of righteousness (Mal. 3:20) that passes the shadow but in the truth and sees it face to face (1Cor. 13:12).

When commenting the verse **9:9**[347] Didymus explains that according to the allegorical meaning "a wife" can mean "wisdom." Other verses from the Holy Scriptures are evidence of this interpretation, *a man of understanding has wisdom* (Prov. 10:23), *I loved her and sought her from my youth and I desires to take her for my bride and I became enamored of her beauty* (Wisd. 8:2). When speaking about the vain days of human life, Didymus agrees with Qohelet that human existence under the sun is futile and the time of the days has its number and end. However, later Didymus finds in the Bible opposite view on this subject. In the Psalms, for example, one can read *With long life I will satisfy him* (91:16), and Exodus 20:12 also contains evidence of prolongation of the human life. *Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long.* Moses shows that God multiplies the days of the life if a man loves Him with all his heart and soul (Deut. 30:6, 20). Therefore, Didymus decides to reinterpret Qohelet's words by using other biblical passages.

In Qohelet's advice **11:9f**[348] to enjoy the youth Didymus sees an allusion to the young men mentioned in 1John 2:14 (*I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one*). Didymus explains that it is not written about a certain age group, but rather about "renewed" soul that has a new man (Col. 3:10). Therefore, in Didymus' opinion, Qohelet speaks about the enjoyment of the word of God.

Didymus continues to interpret Qohelet's words in the allegorical sense. Thus, speaking about the joy of the heart, Didymus suggests to distinguish between the happiness (ευδαιμονια) and the blessedness (μακαρια). Richness and physical health do not make a man happy. Neither good reputation, nor honour gives man blessedness. Only a virtue (αρετηια) of the soul makes man glad. Therefore, visible and fleshly things do not give enjoyment for heart. According to Didymus' interpretation *the ways of the heart* are virtue and contemplation of the truth. Didymus

[347] For Greek text of interpretation see appendix 6.7. (cf. Didymos der Blind, *Kommentar zum Ecclesiastes (Tyra-Papyrus)*, Teil V, ed. Michael Gronewald (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1979), 6-26).
[348] For Greek text of interpretation see appendix 6.8. (cf. Didymos der Blind, *Kommentar zum Ecclesiastes (Tyra-Papyrus)*, Teil VI, ed. Gerhard Binder, Leo Liesenborghs (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1969), 92-114).

again finds the evidence of his reading in the Holy Scriptures: *Blessed are the undefiled in the way, Who walk in the law of the Lord* (Psa. 119:1). Returning to the idea of a *new man* Didymus associates the ways of heart with newness of life in which we should walk (Rom. 6:4). A man has now a new life in Christ and is renewed in knowledge according to the image of God (Col. 3:10).

The next verse (**Qoh 11:10**) induces Didymus to speak about the strength (δυναμος) of soul. He asserts that anger (θυμος) is not quality of heart, but the sphere of courage (θυμοειδους). A man should not use his mind and spirit for anger. He may resort it only in case of courage. Didymus further suggests that the soul has three abilities: angry, mind, and eagerness. The ability of mind distinguishes a man from other living beings while misuse of the ability of angry leads to evil (Qohelet said *put away evil from the flesh*). Didymus explains the last sentences of the verse on the basis of the translation of Septuagint. Blackness of hair is translated as foolishness (ανοια). Following this translation Didymus affirms that if a young man does not go his way impeccably and has no knowledge – he is in ignorance and futility. Thus Didymus returns to his previous thought that only the ways of new life in Christ lead to wisdom and deliver from vanity.

3.6.3. Interpretation of Jerome

Jerome comments the verse **3:19** in the context of the passages **3:18 – 22**.[349] In the beginning Jerome simply retells Qohelet's text. Then he turns to Christian reading and asserts that Qohelet did not think that the soul dies together with flesh and that both the people and animals go in the same place. In Didymus' opinion, Qohelet says it because before coming of Christ all beings were sent to hell. It is only the Gospel that testifies that now there is a great gulf in front of hell, and Abraham is together with Lazarus while the rich is in the sorrow. Moreover, Jerome specifies that while discussing the similarity of death of people and animals, Qohelet does not mention the soul. Qohelet speaks only about the flesh that is created from the earth and will go in the earth. Qohelet does not argue that there is no difference between a man and beast in the nature of the soul. On the contrary, Qohelet as a man of Church, educated by heavenly teaching, has preached this truth that the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of animals goes down to the earth.

[349] For Latin text of interpretation see appendix 6.9. (cf. *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten,* 1094-1096).

Jerome concludes his interpretation by anagogical reading. He demonstrates that all prophets have said that in Jerusalem all men and beast will be saved, and the Promised Land is full of herds of animals. Therefore, in the plan of salvation both people and animals are likewise included. Thus, by offering the abovementioned interpretation Jerome confirms that futility deals only with material side of human life. The coming of the Lord and resurrection overcome vanity and transform life.

Jerome's commentary on the verse **9:9** is very similar to the Didymus' interpretation analyzed above.[350] By quoting Prov. 4:8 (*Exalt her, and she will promote you; She will bring you honor, when you embrace her*) Jerome also associates the wife with the wisdom. A wise man should marry the wisdom and follow the Holy Scriptures. Jerome identifies the days of vanity with the days of "this indecent age" (*hujus saeculi nequam*). Therefore, according to Jerome's opinion, Qohelet gives advice to a man to look for the truth together with wife-wisdom in the days of vanity. Going this way the righteous man can find the true life in this shadowy existence.

Commenting the verse **11:9f**[351] Jerome agrees with Qohelet's advice to enjoy goods of life because it will not be possible in the old age and after death. However, Jerome further explains that Qohelet does not call to enjoyment and does not incline to the teaching of Epicure. On the contrary, he gives advice to fear God's judgment and avoid angry that is mental turmoil and evil from the flesh. Therefore, a wise man should use the good of the world but should not serve the vanity and sin in desires and flesh.

3.6.4. Comparisom

When discussing vain aspect of human life, Qohelet Rabbah practically does not agree with Qohelet's generalization. Thus, the Midrash attributes Qohelet's comparison of men with animals only to wicked people who as well as the beasts will not enter in the World to Come. Contradicting Qohelet, the midrash associates Israel with beast, sheep of God and at the same time denies disparagement of humanity expressed by Qohelet.

Qohelet Rabbah supposes that human life to some extent is vain and shadowy. Therefore, the best way for a man to spend his few days is to occupy himself with words of the Torah which are all of life. The Torah and its study can help the man to overcome the vanity of his existence.

[350] For Latin text of interpretation see appendix 6.10. (cf. *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten,* 1140-1141).
[351] For Latin text of interpretation see appendix 6.11. (cf. *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten,* 1162-1163).

To prove this, the Midrash compares the reference to wife in Qoh. 9:9 with the Torah as the wise man's best life partner. In accordance to rabbinic logic, the enjoyment of life is the study of the written and oral Torah and observance of God's instruction. Otherwise, the man cannot overcome the vanity of life.

From Didymus' commentary one can conclude that he correlates the vanity only with material aspect of human life. Human fleshly life is changeable and inconstant. Thus, comparison with animals is appropriate only with regard to human flesh, because after death human soul separates from the body and continues his existence. Nevertheless, the death of the animals destroys the soul together with flesh. Didymus frequently specifies that earthly material life is shadowy and vain only in comparison to excellent heavenly life. He also juxtaposes this life to the new life in Christ, and old fleshly man to the new man who overcomes futility by means of virtue and contemplation of the truth.

Jerome's interpretation is more brief and specific. Similarly to Didymus, Jerome also associates vanity mentioned by Qohelet with the material life. Jerome identifies the days of vanity with the days of this indecent age. The soul of man, on the contrary, is connected to heaven and, therefore, has nothing in common with futile and transience nature. Jerome also sees in wife (Qoh 9:9) allusion to the wisdom. One who spends his life with wisdom will avoid the futility of life.

When speaking about the differences and similarities in rabbinic and patristic interpretations, one can notice that Qohelet Rabbah, in contrast to Church Fathers, does not depreciate earthly human life. According to rabbis, a man himself makes his life vain by wicked and sinful behavior and disobedience of God's commandments. However, in spite of obvious difference between commentaries, one can try to suppose that there is some aspect of similarity in the identification of the wife with the Torah (the Midrash) and wisdom (Didymus and Jerome). It looks probable that for rabbis the Torah was a source of knowledge and wisdom – and therefore it is "the best partner" for a wise man. Thus, the conclusion that the Torah and wisdom help a man to overcome the futility of his existence, can be further evidence of similarities of exegetical thought of rabbis and Church Fathers.

One can add the attempt to reinterpret the text and to struggle against Qohelet's pessimism to the common tendency of rabbinic and patristic sources. This reinterpretation was done in order to make the book suitable to both religious traditions. According to rabbinic Judaism, human life is God's gift. As a consequence, Qohelet's conclusion is completely

opposite to Jewish faith. It is very likely that the Rabbis, who felt this contradiction, decided to change the text and introduce clarity into Qohelet's generalization. At the same time they wanted to save the Book of Qohelet from accusation of being heretical. The Midrash explains the vain aspect of the life on the basis of ethical question; thus the life becomes vain because of human sin and wickedness. Like in previous interpretations, Qohelet Rabbah "saves" the text by the Torah. In this case the life in accordance with the Torah's commandments again wins over futility. The Church Fathers, who followed ascetic and dualistic view on earthly life, rewrote the text by the use of spiritualization. As a consequence, the patristic sources assert that Qohelet indeed opposes human life on the earth to the spiritual life in Christ and future life on the heavens.

3.7. Death is *hebel*

Qoh 11:7f Truly the light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun. But if a man lives many years and rejoices in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. All that is coming is vanity.

In the verses 11:7f *hebel* most probably denotes the death. Verbal context is evidence of this supposition.[352] By using the images of light and darkness Qohelet juxtaposes life and death. *Yeme hahošek* (Heb. "the days of darkness") do not mean "the old age" because nobody knows that these days will be numerous. *Hoshek* most probably is epithet of the death (Qoh. 6:4; 1Sam. 2:9; Job 10:21; 17:13; 18:18; Ps. 88:13; Prov. 20:20).[353] The words *kol šebba* (Heb. "all that is coming") also denotes reality after death.[354] All that will come after death is vain non-existence.[355] M. Fox asserts that the death is not ephemeral and futile, but rather absurd. In his opinion, after death there are no mind, meaning and reward.[356] C. L. Seow suggests that *kol* in this passage denotes not only human fate after death, but also whole experience of human life.[357]

3.7.1. Interpretation of Midrash Qohelet Rabbah

[352] Some scholars suggest that *hebel* does not denote the death and ascribe it to the broader context "the enjoyment of youth" (E. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*, 181; R.B. Scott, *Proverbs. Ecclesiastes*, 253-254; D. B. Miller, "Qohelet's Symbolic Use of ," 448).
[353] R. Gordis, *Koheleth*, 334. Seow supposes that "the days of darkness" are sad and unhappy day of some man (C.L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 348).
[354] R. Gordis, *Koheleth*, 334; M. Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 43.
[355] R. Gordis, *Koheleth*, 335.
[356] M. Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 43.
[357] C.L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 348.

In its commentaries on these verses Qohelet Rabbah offers a brief symbolic interpretation centered around the Torah.[358] Thus, according to rabbis, sweet light mentioned by Qohelet is the light of the Torah. The Midrash associates the contemplation of the sun with the one who is happy because his study of the Torah enlightens him like the sun. The Midrash also compares the sweet light with the light of the World to Come. Qohelet's advice to rejoice life Qohelet Rabbah again associates with the joy of Torah. The Midrash understands the days of darkness as the days of evil, which are mentioned in the verse Qoh 12:1, that are the days of old age. Concluding the interpretation Qohelet Rabbah does not attribute *hebel* to the death and old age, but again returns to the concept of the Torah and asserts that the Torah, which a man learns in this world, is vanity in comparison with the Torah which will be learnt in the days of the Messiah (parallel interpretations are also to be found in the commentary of Qoh 1:13; 2:1).

Targum Qohelet, similarly to the Midrash, understands the sweet light as an allusion to the light of the Torah: "And the light *of the Torah* is sweet and good *to illumine dim eyes that they may see the glory of the face of Shekinah which will illumine the face of the righteous from the splendor of His Shekinah and that their beauty may be the sun.* For if a man lives many days it is proper that he rejoices in all of them *and occupies himself with the Torah of the Lord.* And let him remember the dark days *of death and not sin.* For many are the days *which the deceased lies in the grave and it is proper for him to receive judgment from Heaven for his life which he loved, all the time that punishment comes upon him for the* vanity *which he has done.*"[359] In addition to the concept of the light of the Torah, Targum introduces the concept of Shekinah that is the glory of the divine presence, conventionally represented as light. Thus, the Torah and Divine Shekinah are the sun for the righteous and wise man. Further Targum also reads the joy of life as the enjoyment of the study of the Torah. According to the biblical text the days of darkness are interpreted as symbol of death. Then Targum turns to the theme of sin and God's judgment that follow death. In this context Targum does not attribute *hebel* to the death, but considers it vain and sinful activity of man during his life. Thus, the reading of the Targum unites these verses with the passage that follows (Qoh 11:9 – 12:7).

3.7.2. Interpretation of Didymus of Alexandria

[358] For Hebrew text of interpretation see appendix 7.1.
[359] *The Targum Qohelet*, 52.

While commenting the verses **11:7f** Didymus prefers to speak about each phrase separately.[360] He supposes that one can understand *the sweet light* in two different aspects. The word "light" can denote the visible world. However, in the divine meaning, it is eternal light mentioned in John 1:9 (*That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world*). Human eyes are enlightened by this light (Eph. 1:18). Didymus associates the light in Qohelet with Christ. Continuing to interpret Qohelet's words by other verses of the Bible, Didymus sees connection with Ps. 33:9 (*Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good*) and Ps. 118:103 (*How sweet are Your words to my taste, Sweeter than honey to my mouth!*). Therefore, for the inner eyes of the soul the true sweet light is the Words of God. Drawing a further parallel between the natures of visible light and Divine light, Didymus asserts that Divine Light, in contrast to visible light, appears by itself and nobody creates it. Thus Didymus wishes to unite Qohelet's words with John 14:21 (*He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him*) and to develop the theological theme of the nature of Trinity. The nature of Father and Son is the same, Father reveals himself from Son as well as Son reveals himself from Father. Didymus finds the evidence of this statement in the Gospel: *He who has seen Me has seen the Father* (John 14:8).

Interpreting the next verse Didymus suggests that Qohelet means a man who keeps the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26), knows the true light, in the morning sows his seed, and in the evening does not withhold his hand (Qoh. 11:6). Therefore he rejoices his life. Didymus also specifies that it does not mean that all years of human life will be full of joy and pleasure. On the contrary, the wise man is glad not only for pleasant things, but also for unpleasant events which he endures with self-control. Didymus again sees the evidence for this idea in the Holy Scriptures. For example, Psalmist says *I will bless the Lord at all times* even though the circumstances might be unpleasant and painful.

Didymus decides to unite Qohelet's words about remembrance of the days of darkness with the quotation from Isa.65:16f. He uses this to discuss the question of eschatology. It is written in Isaiah that God will create new heavens and a new earth, and the former troubles shall not be remembered or come to mind. Didymus concludes that when cosmos will be changed and the promise will be realized – then there will be no remembrance of affliction. Therefore, Didymus' reading reinterprets Qohelet's text by emphasizing theological interest of Didymus'

[360] For Greek text of interpretation see appendix 7.2. (cf. Didymos der Blind, *Kommentar zum Ecclesiastes (Tyra-Papyrus)*, Teil VI, 70-92).

lectures in catechetical school. Didymus intentionally digresses from the negative theme of death and turns to the question of God's judgment and eschatological reality.

Didymus does not attribute the last words of the verse *all that is coming is vanity* directly to death. In his opinion, *all that is coming* is not eternal and, therefore, visible creation is transient. Didymus again bases this interpretation on the Holy Scripture. In this case he quotes 2Cor. 4:18 *For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.* Continuing juxtaposing divine light to earthly reality, Didymus asserts that those visible and temporary things are futile in comparison with transcendence. The exegete mentions figurative example in order to show significant difference. The light of lamp or flame is futile in comparison to the light of sun because of its poorness. Thus Didymus generalizes the meaning of *hebel* in this passage and at the same time unites this interpretation with the abovementioned commentary of introductory words in Qoh. 1:2. In his interpretation of Qoh. 1:2 he also juxtaposed ephemeral and vain worldly reality to transcendent divine light.

3.7.3. Interpretation of Jerome.

Jerome comments the passage **11:7f** in the context of the verse 11:6.[361] Jerome allegorically understands morning and evening labour (11:6) as virtue and righteousness that a man must follow both in his youth and old age. Acting thus in any age the man will see God Father who is sweet light and Christ who is the sun of righteousness. In this association of the sweet light and sun with Farther and Son of Trinity, Jerome is close to the abovementioned Didymus' reading. In contrast to Didymus, however, Jerome's interpretation has didactic nature. Jerome understands the days of darkness as image of the death. If a man remembers the death and coming of darkness, he will achieve a defiance of the present that is transient, unstable and impermanent. Similarly to Didymus, Jerome does not attributes *hebel* to the death; he refers it rather to earthly human life.

Concluding his interpretation, Jerome decides to unite all three verses. He asserts that morning and evening labours allude to the study and combination of the Old and New Testaments. In order to introduce and to give proof of the theme of unity of both Testaments, Jerome quotes Deut.11:14 (*I will give you the early rain and the latter rain*) that he allegorically understand as allusion to the Promise of God and giving of the Testaments. Jerome lets know that Christian should read the Old Testament without belittling the Gospel and look for spiritual

[361] For Latin text of interpretation see appendix 7.3. (cf. *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten,* 1160).

meaning of the Old Testament without thinking that evangelists and apostles speak only about the latter. Jerome sees the necessity to revere both Testaments in our ignorance of which Testament gives God's knowledge and grace. Therefore, blessed is one who unites the both Testaments in one and makes them like one flesh. If he achieves it, he will see the light, Christ who is the sun of righteousness. According to Jerome's interpretation, the great joy mentioned by Qohelet is the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. The days of darkness and eternal torments, on the contrary, will be prepared to those who did not unite Testaments and did not see the light and sun.

Thus, in this Jerome's commentary one can also see the reinterpretation of Qohelet's text. Jerome reads the biblical text according to Christian theological interests and tries to find allusion to Christ and the New Testament in any verse of the Old.

3.7.4. Comparison

In spite of the association of the days of darkness with the death, rabbinic sources do not refer *hebel* to the end of human life. Their interpretation is built on the concept of the Torah. Thus, the Torah and Divine Shekinah are understood as the sun and sweet light for the righteous and wise man. Enjoyment of life also is associated with the study of the Torah. In this context the rabbis interpret *hebel* as the study of the Torah in this world – because in this earthly reality the study of the Torah is not perfect in comparison to the learning of the Torah in the World of Messiah.

The Church Fathers also prefer to interpret Qohelet's text allegorically. Thus, the sweet light and the sun are compared to God Father and Christ. Didymus does not discuss the question of the vanity of the death while turning to the subject of God's judgment and eschatology. *Hebel* is attributed to visible creation and worldly life that is not eternal, but transient. Jerome understands the days of darkness as the image of the death that will be prepared to those who did not see the light and sun, i.e. God.

The difference between the rabbinic and patristic sources is obvious. Both rabbis and Church Fathers understand Qohelet's text according to their respective religious tradition and teaching. However, in spite of theological confrontation, we can attempt to deduce here traces of similarity in their exegetical approach. The sun is the Torah for Rabbis – and the divine light or God (Trinity) for Fathers. The study of the Torah is great enjoyment of the life of the sages –

while Jerome understands the joy as knowledge of the Holy Scripture. Furthermore, Jerome emphasizes the necessary to unite the Torah and Gospel because both Testaments have God's grace. Therefore, rabbinic and patristic exegetes have common tendency to juxtapose the holiness of their religious tradition to the futility of earthly reality.

When speaking about reinterpretation of Qohelet's text, one can see that rabbinic and patristic sources completely rewrite the text and offer additional meaning which is based on spiritualization of Qohelet's words. Both Rabbis and Fathers avoid speaking about the death. They are rather engaged to explain what is the spiritual meaning of the sun and light in this Qohelet's verse in the context of Jewish and Christian faith. Therefore, preparation of the ground for discussion about values of each religious tradition was the aim of this change of the text.

3.8. All is *habel habelim*

Qoh. 1:2, 12:8 Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher; "Vanity of vanities, all *is* vanity."

The beginning of the book of Qohelet (*habel habelim 'amar kohelet habel habelim hakol habel* (Qoh 1:2))[362] usually is understood as the statement of the main theme. Together with the identical verse at the end of the book (Qoh 12:8) this expression is motto that resumes Qohelet's thought and puts it in the poetic frame. The word *hakol* (Heb. "all") in the book of Qohelet is not used as a universal category. In other books of the Old Testament *hakol* indicates only the things that have already been mentioned in the context of the book. It does not mean that all in universe is *hebel*; *hakol* indicates human experience in this world. Obviously, *hakol* is a synonym of the expression *kol 'ašer na'asah tahat haššemeš* (Qoh 1:9, 13, 14; 2:17; 8:17; 9:3, 6).[363] Thus, one can understand *hakol* as indication of all that is called *hebel* by Qohelet throughout the book. "All" resumes and includes all things and events in the human life whose nature is *hebel.* Therefore, the verse 1:2 is an introduction of the statement, while 12:8 is a conclusion and evidence that all mentioned is *hebel.* Scholars offered following translations of this thematic statement: "vanity of vanities, all is vanity,"[364] "discordance" or "disharmony,"[365] "mystery,"[366]

[362] Obviously the verses 1:2 and 12:8 is alliteration with repetition of *h* and *l* (C.L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 113).
[363] R. Gordis, *Koheleth*, 125; R.B. Scott, *Proverbs. Ecclesiastes*, 209; M. Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 44-45; C.L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 103,112 -113; B. L. Berger, "Qohelet and the Exigencies of the Absurd," 159.
[364] R. Gordis, *Koheleth*, 125.
[365] E. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*, 182.
[366] As cited in B. L. Berger, "Qohelet and the Exigencies of the Absurd," 144.

"absurdity,"[367] "illusion,"[368] "breath of a breath... all is breath,"[369] "senseless,"[370] or combination of three metaphoric meanings (insubstantiality, transience, foulness).[371]

3.8.1. Interpretation of Midrash Qohelet Rabbah

In the Midrash Qohelet Rabbah one can find three different commentaries on verse 1:2[372] in particular, and the interpretations of *hebel*-concept in general.[373] The Midrash Qohelet Rabbah does not understand *hebel* in the categories of existence and universe. First two interpretations of 1:2 interpret *hebel* as referring only to human beings and life. The first explanation is put in Solomon's and David's mouth. Thus, the Midrash explains Solomon's words by his father's words. Quoting the words of Psalm 144:4, the Midrash compares humanity to "the most elusive vapor" that escapes from the topmost of seven pots. Pointing to another aspect of the meaning of *hebel*, humanity is also compared to shadow. Obviously, in this interpretation the Midrash is influenced by Qohelet's own comparison of human life with shadow (6:12, *days of man's vain life which he passes like a shado*w). Qohelet Rabbah asserts that the shadow of human existence is more vain and tiny than the shadow of a wall, a palm-tree and a bird, because a wall and a tree have permanent existence in comparison with human live. Only the shadow of passing bees has symbolic resemblance with transience of human existence. R. Sandberg showed that such a negative interpretation of human existence is rather untypical of rabbinic literature. The rabbis usually preferred to show that humanity held a special place in the story of creation and human existence did not really end with death. However, interpreting this verse as an allusion to human existence only, the Midrash prevents Qohelet from saying that whole creation is equally futile.[374]

The second midrashic interpretation also refers to the human existence only. Qohelet Rabbah asserts that seven "vanities" mentioned by Qohelet correspond to the seven worlds which a man beholds. The mention of seven "vanities" is based on the numeric value of the

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[367] M. Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 46.
[368] B. L. Berger, "Qohelet and the Exigencies of the Absurd," 145.
[369] R.B. Scott, *Proverbs. Ecclesiastes*, 209.
[370] C.L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 113.
[371] D. B. Miller, "Qohelet's Symbolic Use of ," 452.
[372] In this analysis I will examine rabbinic and patristic interpretations only of the verse 1:2 because in the most of commentaries the interpretation of the verse 12:8 is absent or identical with 1:2.
[373] For Hebrew text of interpretation see appendix 8.1. (cf. Midrash Kohelet Rabbah, in *The CD ROM Judaic classics library*).
[374] R. N. Sandberg, *Rabbinic Views of Qohelet*, 51. R. Sandberg has accepted that there are four modes of interpretations in Qohelet Rabbah: 1) reading the text as symbolism; 2) attaching added meaning of the text; 3) transforming generalizations into specifics; and 4)accepting the literal text and its context. According to this division, scholar suggests that the abovementioned interpretation belongs to the third mode, because Qohelet Rabbah does acknowledge that the statement of verse 1:2 has some truth to it, but only as it applies to a specific situation (ibid., 30-33).

Hebrew phrase *habel habelim… habel habelim. Hakol habel*. According to this interpretation, *hebel* in the singular is equal to one, while the plural form *habelim* is equal to two. Consequently, *hebel* used seven times refers not to the vanity of existence, but to the seven stages of human life. At the beginning of life the man is like a king, fondled and kissed by all. Nevertheless, he ends his life with the feebleness of old age; in this period of life, according to the Midrash, he is like an ape. However, it is not inevitable that the old age destroys human strength. The Midrash contrasts infirmity of elder years with knowledge of the Torah, which can keep a person strong and admired as a "king." The Midrash quotes a verse of 1 Kings 1:1 as a proof of its claim: although David was old, he was still a king. His wisdom kept him in the status of king, loved and admired as when he was first born. This allusion means that the Midrash defines "vanity" as the inevitable declining stages of human life, which happen only to those who are ignorant of the Torah. The disintegration that comes with age is not inevitable for all people. The wisdom of the Torah can save from futility and transience of the existence; it is able to maintain even an elderly person with the admiration and intellectual vigor usually reserved for the young. In Ruth Sandberg's opinion, the Midrash reads here the text as symbolism. It means that the Midrash does not follow the literal meaning of Qohelet's words, but instead reads the language of the text as symbolic of another subject or image, or as an allegory.[375]

In the last interpretation the Midrash uses exegetical method of referring to other books of the Scripture. Here the Midrash shows that *hebel* refers not only to the futility of human life and activity, but also to the existence and the universe. According to the midrashic interpretation the seven *havelim* mentioned by Qohelet correspond to the seven days of creation. Qohelet Rabbah quotes the verses from the book of Genesis and at the same time contrasts them with another verses from the Scripture, producing by this contraposition an intentional antithesis. For example, one can read in the Midrash: "on the first day, *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth* (Gen 1:1); but it is written, *For the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment* (Isa.51:6)."[376] Qohelet Rabbah continues to propose antithesis to each of six days of creation. Nevertheless, with regard to the Sabbath it expresses a different opinion: "With regard to the Sabbath what is there for you to say? *Every one that profaneth it shall surely be put to death* (Ex. 31:14). The penalty of death only applies to one who deliberately profanes it, but one who does so inadvertently brings an offering and obtains atonement. R. Berekiah said: When Adam perceived the excellence of the Sabbath, that (for it's

[375] R. N. Sandberg, *Rabbinic Views of Qohelet*, 30, 49-50.
[376] *Midrash Rabbah. Ecclesiastes*, 5-6.

unintentional desecration) one could bring an offering and gain atonement[377], he began to sing to an offering and gain atonement, he began to sing to the Holy One, blessed be He, praise and a psalm concerning it. That is what is written, *A Psalm, a Song. For the Sabbath day* (Ps. 92:1). R. Levi said: Adam composed that Psalm."[378] At first sight, it seems that Qohelet Rabbah expresses heretical opinion by quoting antithesis and interpreting *hebel* in the context of the process of creation. However, it is evident from the quoted text that Qoheleth Rabbah aims to suggest that the Sabbath is without *hebel* ("vanity"). Furthermore, it implies that the Sabbath is God's creation and is a blessing to the mankind. The Sabbath means a completion of the process of creation and its perfection. As a result, this midrashic opinion, whilst using the reflection on sanctity of Sabbath, justifies the whole creation. This understanding of the Sabbath allows to suggest that the existence, in spite of its imperfection, is not utterly futile. The abovementioned midrashic exegetical method of quotation of different verses from the Bible is most common in Qohelet Rabbah.[379] This method is based on the opinion that one verse of the Bible can explain another verse because of the unity of the biblical text. The aim of this exegetical method is to unite biblical message combining various biblical viewpoints in the consequent unity.[380] One can come to the conclusion that this midrashic method has some similarity with the approach of the Church Fathers to quote the New Testament in order to explain the meaning of the Old Testament. [381]

As has been shown by earlier quotations, Qohelet Rabbah proposes three different interpretations of *hebel*. None of them is literal. The Midrash uses symbols and allegory; it represents *hebel* as a metaphor referring to some aspects of the meaning of the word. We also see in Qohelet Rabbah widespread rabbinic method to interpreter one biblical verse by another.

The interpretation of Targum Qohelet is historical. Qohelet's conclusion that all is vanity is attributed to the king Solomon. The targumist sees the cause of pessimistic expression in real dramatic events of Israel history. "*When Solomon the king of Israel saw through the holy spirit that the kingdom of Rehoboam his son would be divided with Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that Jerusalem and Temple would be destroyed and the people of the household of Israel would go*

[377] According to Pesiḳ . R. 23; Tan., Bemidbar Rabbah, 20 Sabbath is the Day of Atonement. For details, see Emil G. Hirsh et al., "Sabbath" in *Jewish Encyclopedia*, http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=13&letter=S#58
[378] *Midrash Rabbah. Ecclesiastes,* 6.
[379] Johannes Watchen, *Midrasch-Analyze. Strukturen im Midrasch Qohelet Rabba*, 131.
[380] Andreas Vonach-Innsbruck, "Der Ton macht Musik," 38.
[381] E.g. rabbis suggest that Qohelet is Solomon and prove this assumption by quoting biblical verses about King Solomon. Church Fathers, on the other hand, see in Qohelet the reference to Jesus Christ (M. Hirshman, "The Greek Fathers and the Aggada on Ecclesiastes,"155-157).

into exile, he said to himself, "Vanity of vanities *is this world!* Vanity of vanities of everything *for which I and David my farther laboured.* All of it is vanity."[382] Therefore, the events mentioned above lead to this conclusion and give Solomon the motivation for the writing of the book. Targum does not understand *hebel* as an abstract concepts, but prefers to associate it only with the labours of Solomon and David and the history of Israel in this world.[383]

3.8.2. Interpretation of Didymus of Alexandria

Didymus' interpretation of Qoh.1:2 is not complete.[384] The lack of some sentences makes the task of understanding the text much more difficult. While reading the text one can notice that Didymus' commentary alternates with questions and objections from his audience. Didymus' students apparently induced him to explain the meaning of "vanity" (ματαιότης). In his opinion the expression *habel habelim* ("vanity of vanity") means extreme vanity, similar to the concept of "the knowledge of the knowledge" or "the virtue of the virtues." Vanity is equally worthless in the face of the light of the truth. In order to clarify his thought Didymus gives one more example of comparison: "An infant and a boy are imperfect when compared to a young man. But they are imperfect when compared to adult man."

During his conversation with the audience Didymus interprets Qohelet's words by using the New Testament. As it was demonstrated in previous fragments, this tendency in general is most commonly used in patristic exegesis. In order to explain the meaning of *hebel*, Didymus turns to the first Epistle to the Corinthians. *Hebel* (vanity) is opposed by Didymus to the perfection in Christ. In general, the aim of his lecture is "to preach wisdom between matures or perfects (τελειοι)" (1Cor. 2:6)[385]. In Didymus opinion it is vain to preach to the Jews in order to win them (1Cor. 9:20-22)[386] since an admonition and a teaching may present everyone perfect

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[382] *The Targum of Qohelet*,18.

[383] Targum Qohelet similary to Midrash Qohelet Rabbah also usually rewrites the text using rabbinic concept and tranformes Qohelet's wisdom into Torah. See also Paul V. M. Flesher, "The Wisdom of the Sages: Rabbinic Rewriting of Qohelet," in *Aramaic in Postbiblical Judaism and Early Christianity. Papers from thr 2004 National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminar at Duke University,* ed. Eric M. Meyers, and Paul V. M. Flesher (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 269-279.

[384] For Greek text of interpretation see appendix 8.2. (cf. Didymus der Blinde, *Kommentar zum Ecclesiastes* (Tura Papyrus) Teil 1.1, ed. Gerhard Binder and Leo Liesenborghs (Bonn, 1978), 36-45)).

[385] In this verse Paul states that Gospel involves a higher wisdom discernible by those who are mature (*teleioi*), those who have attained the goal and are spiritually mature or perfection. In Paul's opinion this wisdom does not come from this age of time and space and certainly not from the rulers of this age. But these rulers with their wisdom will end up in futility (v. 6b). Most probably that spiritually mature mentioned by Paul are the saved, those enlightened by the Holy Spirit in contrast to the unsaved. Paul argues that it is the unsaved who think the gospel is foolish (1:21-23) and that the unsaved person does not receive the things of the Spirit of God (2:14).

[386] In discussing his self-sacrificing concern in 1Cor. 9:20-23, Paul mentions three groups – the Jews, the Gentiles, and those whose consciences are weak. For the Jews' sake Paul became like a Jew. That is, when necessary and regarding

only in Christ (Col. 1:28).[387] Therefore, according to Didymus' reading, the perfect in Christ and matures in faith of His Gospel are not liable to *hebel* (vanity).

Another question from the audience induced Didymus to speak about the vanity of the visible and tangible world. Didymus denies the absolute vanity of the existence and bases his conclusion on the suggestion that God is visible and cognizable in His creation (Rom 1:19f). This logical deduction automatically excludes and mitigates universal and negative meaning of the verse 1:2 (*habel habelim*). The visible material world is vanity only in comparison to the spiritual world. Following this theme, Didymus suggests that vanity (*hebel*) shows the correlation with life and behavior of some people. The human futile activity in material world is opposed to "the pure in heart for they will see God" (Mat 5:8).[388] The discussion about futile activity and virtue is continued in the context of the meaning of circumcision. The physical circumcision is opposed to "the circumcision of the heart" (Rom 2:29).[389] The literal meaning of the circumcision is vain while "the circumcision of the heart," on the contrary, is pure. The physical circumcision is understood as imitation and preparation for spiritual circumcision prescribed by God.

The analysis of Didymus' interpretation which was carried out above clearly shows that in spite of seemingly absolute character of Qohelet's expression in the verse 1:2, Didymus did not intend to explain it as a reference to the futility of existence and creation. He has mentioned some examples of worldly imperfection and futile human activity in order to explain that visible world is futile only in comparison to divine world. However, in the light of New Testament teaching, Didymus has tried to prove that imperfection and vanity are surmountable in Christ. In his opinion, the one who is pure in heart and who contemplates the Wisdom of God is not subjected to the vanity.

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indifferent matters, he conformed to the practice of Jewish law (Acts 16:3; 18:18; 21:20-26) to win the Jews. Therefore, Didymus in contrast to Paul's opinion denies the salvation of Jews.

[387] The aim of Paul's proclaiming, admonishing, and teaching was to "present everyone perfect in Christ". "Present" (*paristemi*) refers to the bringing into God's presence at the return of Christ (cf. 1Thess 2:19-20; 5:23). "Perfect" refers to maturity in faith and character (cf. Eph 4:13), and it is a prospect held out for "everyone". Such maturity is possible "in Christ", that is, by virtue of the believer's union with Christ.

[388] Commentators offer two explanation of this phrase: 1) some take it to mean inner moral purity as opposed to merely external piety or ceremonial cleanness. This is an important theme in Matthew and elsewhere in the Scriptures (e.g., Deut 10:16; 30:6; 1Sam 15:22; Psa. 24:3-4; 51:6, 10; Isa 1:10-17; Jer. 4:4; 7:3-7; 9:25-26; Rom 2:9; 1Tim 1:5; 2Tim 2:22, cf. Matt 23:25-28); 2) others take it to mean single-mindedness, a heart "free from the tyranny of a divided self". Several of the passages just cited focus on freedom from deceit (Psa. 24:4; 51:4-17; cf. also Gen 50:5-6; Prov. 22:11). This interpretation also prepares the way for 6:22. The "pure in heart" are thus "the utterly sincere".

[389] Most probably the idea of circumcision of the heart Paul based on Deut 30:6; Jer 4:4; 9:25, 26. He asserts that a real Jew is one who has circumcision of the heart, accomplished "by the Spirit, not by the written code" (cf. 2Cor 3:6).

3.8.3. Interpretation of Gregory of Nyssa

Gregory of Nyssa offers detailed interpretation of the verse 1:2.[390] He uses, just as Didymus did, Greek equivalent (translation) of Hebrew *hebel* (ματαιότης).[391] At the beginning of his interpretation Gregory is going to explain some aspects of the meaning of *hebel*. By quoting different examples and utterances, he generally distinguishes three meanings of *hebel*: meaningless, pointlessness, and frustration. He writes: "'Futility' is either a meaningless word, or an unprofitable activity, or an unrealized plan, or unsuccessful effort, or in general what serves no useful purpose at all." From the presumptive explanation of term "futility" Gregory turns to reflection on the meaning of the intensified form *hebel habelim* ("futility of futilities"). In order to investigate what "futility of futility" means, Gregory advices "to examine the scripture usage on what things are thought of as superior." In this case the exegetical method to explain the Scripture by the Scripture itself is used. Gregory writes: "To do what is necessary and useful is termed *work* in scripture, but the more exalted endeavours, concerned directly with the service of God, is called *work of works* (Num 4:47)… Similarly something is said to be *holy* in scripture, and something else is *holy of holies* (Ex 26:33-34), suggesting that in the same degree that the holy is superior to the profane, the holy of holies is superior to the holy, being considered supreme in holiness"… Also futility of futilities indicates the absolute extreme of what is futile". If we return to Didymus's commentary, we can notice that in the abovementioned rhetorical technique Gregory has some similarity with Didymus' technique of the use of analogies. This fact gives a chance to assume the existence of common exegetical approaches widespread in the Alexandrian and Cappadocian exegetical schools.

It seems very likely that previous discourse is but a preface to the main idea of Gregory's interpretation: the futility of all things does not deny God's creation. Gregory applies the expression "futility of futilities" to the physical universe. His idea is to argue that the dual composition of man into soul and body is parallel to a further distinction in order of things between the unseen and the seen. The life of the body is mortal and oriented towards the present; the soul on contrary is deathless and looks to eternity. However, this argument is not a reproach to the Creator since he is the source both of the soul and the body. Gregory suggests: "for anyone trained in the divine mysteries[392] is surely aware that the life conformed to the divine nature is

[390] For Greek text of interpretation see appendix 8.3. (cf. *In Ecclesiasten*, 620-621).
[391] Printed English translation of Homilies offers "futility" as a best equivalent.
[392] Gregory was familiar with classic rhetoric and philosophy and it is no wonder that many of Gregory's thoughts have Platonic echoes. In more detail about Platonic influence on the interpretation of this fragment writes Anthony Meredith in *Homily I*, in *Gregory of Nyssa. Homilies on Ecclesiastes*, 149-150. In general, Gregory's arguments depend on

proper and natural to mankind, while the life of sense-perception, lived through the activity of the sense, has been granted to that nature in order that the knowledge the visible world might become a guide to the soul for knowledge of things unseen." One can assume that Gregory's idea corresponds to the abovementioned Didymus' interpretation in which he argued that God was present in all creations. It is obvious from the text that Gregory's aim was to disengage our attention from things seen and focus upon things unseen and real. In general, as Mark Hirshman has noted, Gregory exegesis and commentary were brief preliminaries to his primary goal of using Ecclesiastes as a vehicle to ascend from the worldly to the spiritual.[393] Careful reading of the text makes it clear that in spite of some dualistic character of its interpretation, "futility of futilities" is not referred to whole existence and creation.

In the commentary on verses 1:3-7 Gregory continues the theme of futility. The central purpose of this section is to demonstrate the futility of human success, life, and prospects. Gregory develops this thought by elaborating the theme of parallel between the cyclic character of the universe and of human life.

3.8.4. Interpretation of Jerome

Jerome's interpretation of verse 1:2 consists of different exegetical levels. [394] At the beginning of explanation Jerome puts a question: "If all things that God made are truly good then how all things can be considered vanity, and not only vanity, but even vanity of vanities?" Jerome's interpretation analyzed below can be considered an answer to this question. In order to explain futile character of the being Jerome decides to opposite it to God, His greatness and eternity. Only in case of this comparison we can conclude that existence is *hebel* (vanity). "Heaven, earth, the seas and all things that are contained within its compass can be said to be good in themselves, but compared to God they are nothing… so in looking at the world and the multitudinous varieties of nature I am amazed at the greatness of the world, but I also remember that all things will pass away and the world will grow old, and that only God is that which has always been. On account of this realisation I am compelled to say, not once but twice: Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." It is clear that Jerome's understanding of *hebel* is to a great extent based on the conception of time and eternity. The world is created by God and in contrast to God and invisible spiritual world it has its beginning and end.

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weaving Christianity with contemporary philosophy, and the vocabulary and language of both are developed in the Homilies.

[393] M. Hirshman, "The Greek Fathers and the Aggada on Ecclesiastes. Formats of Exegesis in Late Antiquity," 151.

[394] For the Latin text of interpretation, see appendix 8.4. (cf. *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten*, 1086).

In this particular case, as well as in other commentaries of his, Jerome interpreters the text by philological method. He turns to an explanation of the meaning of the Hebrew word *hebel* and its Greek translations. In his opinion, the literal meaning of *hebel* is "vapour, breath." This meaning refers to the vanity of being, because all visible is transient, but invisible is eternal. If one compares this idea to the interpretations of the Church Fathers analyzed above, it will be obvious that they have a common idea with regard to the comparison of visible and invisible being in order to explain the concept of *hebel* and its connection to existence.

Having completed this interpretation, Jerome moves to another exegetical level. Jerome understands that simply to state that existence is futile (vain) is wrong in the light of the message of the Gospel. Jerome concludes that "all things are and will be vain, until we find that which is complete and perfect."[395] Evidently these words refer to Christian revelation and eschatological times. The whole being in comparison to Christ stays in vanity and only in His perfection the being can get salvation. I suppose that Jerome's conclusion has some similarity with Didymus' idea about Christ's victory over vanity and imperfection.

Jerome's train of thought demonstrates that his exegetical methodology consists of various stages. He turns from literal interpretation to allegorical and normally tries to conclude his thought with Christian and Christological interpretation. He does so in order to prove that all Old Testament words are comprehensible in the light of Jesus Christ revelation. Jerome successfully uses this approach also with regard to the concept of *hebel*.

3.8.5. Comparison

The Midrash Qohelet Rabbah does not understand *hebel* in the categories of existence and universe and generally interprets *hebel* of the verse 1:2 as referring only to human beings and life. The Midrash compares humanity to "the most elusive vapor" that escapes from the topmost of seven pots. Qohelet Rabbah asserts that seven "vanities" mentioned by Qohelet refers not to the vanity of existence, but to the seven stages of human life. Qohelet Rabbah also resorts to the allegorical interpretation and suggests that the seven *havelim* correspond to the seven days of creation. However, Shabbat – as perfection of creation – denies the futility of the world. Qohelet Rabbah supposes that the Torah could save a man from vanity of his life. Each person that follows the example of King David in the study of the Torah can avoid disintegration of old age, spiritual infirmity and futile character of his existence. Targum also does not understand

[395] Jerome's words make it possible to assume that he refers here to Rom 8:18-22. Here one can observe Church Fathers' widespread method to explain the Old Testament by using citations and thoughts of the New Testament.

hebel in abstract concepts, but prefers to associate it only with the labours of Solomon and David, and the history of Israel in this world.

Didymus explains that phrase "vanity of vanities" means "extreme vanity" similar to the concept of "the knowledge of the knowledge" or "the virtue of the virtues." Vanity is equally worthless in the face of the light of the truth. *Hebel* (vanity) is opposed by Didymus to the perfection in Christ. Therefore, one who is the perfect in Christ and matures in faith of His Gospel, is not liable to *hebel* (vanity). Didymus also excludes universal and negative meaning of the verse 1:2 (*habel habelim*). The visible material world is vanity only in comparison to the spiritual world. God is visible and cognizable in His creation. Therefore, the world and human life can not be utterly futile.

While discussing the concept of *hebel* Gregory generally distinguishes three meanings of *hebel*: meaningless, pointlessness, and frustration. Like Didymus, Gregory suggests that the futility of all things does not deny God's creation. In Gregory's opinion, the visible world might become a guide to the soul for knowledge of things unseen. Therefore, material side of life is not utterly futile, but also has its value and meaning. Gregory also has tendency to refer *hebel* rather to human activity and behavior, than to world as God's creation. Thus human sin and wrong use of free will are the cause of futility in the world.

Jerome refers *hebel* to the vanity of worldly being, because all visible is transient, but invisible is eternal. Like previous Fathers, Jerome also suggests that in the light of the message of the Gospel existence is not utterly futile. If one is perfect in Christ, he is not yet futile. The whole being in comparison to Christ stays in vanity – and only in His perfection the being can get salvation.

The comparison carried out above has demonstrated the differences between the Rabbis' and the Fathers' thoughts. Here I would like to point out to some ideas which may testify to some similarities between these two different exegetical schools. We have already noted that both rabbinic and patristic commentaries determine "vain" aspect of human life. At the same time, they mention a way by which one can win over vanity. The Midrash sees this way in the study of the Torah and in the life according to the Torah commandments. Church Fathers suggest that salvation from futility and vanity is possible only in the perfect Christ and in the light of His Gospel. Of course, these two different exegetical schools offer different ways to win over vanity. Nevertheless, I think that there is a certain similarity in their tendency to find salvation and achieve the victory over vanity in the Scripture, religious tradition and virtue. Another similarity is clearly manifested in the common conclusion that the verse 1:2 of Qohelet ("all is *hebel*") does

not refer to futility of whole being. The Midrash understands *hebel* as a symbol of some aspects of human life only. Church Fathers likewise suggest that God has no relation to vanity. In their opinion, material word is created by God and therefore it is not vain. Only in comparison to God is material world futile because of its transience. In fact, the vain human activity imparts futile aspect to the existence and world. As has been mentioned, Church Fathers see the salvation only in Christ and His revelation.

In my opinion, these similarities may testify to some potential exegetical encounters between these rabbinic and patristic exegetical schools. On the other hand, even if this alleged encounter has never taken place, there is no wonder that both traditions came to a similar conclusion with regard to the concept of *hebel*. Both rabbis and fathers shared common biblical text and tradition. Therefore, in some cases their interpretations might have been similar.

The abovementioned rabbinic and patristic readings again demonstrate the rewriting of Qohelet's text that has a certain aim and motivation. Both Jewish and Christian exegetes realized that if Qohelet's "all is *hebel*" is a reference to the Creation as a whole, the book cannot be included in the biblical canon because of its heretical mood. Therefore, by offering the reinterpretation of this verse which was mentioned above, the rabbinic and patristic sources avoided Qohelet's generalization and tried to liberate the book from the burden of its pessimism, contradictions, and freethinking.

IV CONCLUSION

This thesis was devoted to the analysis and understanding of *hebel*-concept of the Book of Qohelet in the selected rabbinic and patristic sources. The attention was paid to the Midrash Qohelet Rabbah and patristic commentaries composed by three Church Fathers, namely Didymus of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, and Jerome. The works mentioned above represent various types and genres of rabbinic and patristic exegesis.

The research had several aims: 1) to demonstrate that the comparative study of early biblical exegesis in Jewish and Christian traditions plays an important role in understanding the Bible in general and the Book of Qohelet in particular. Therefore, analysis of rabbinic and patristic commentaries give us possibility to improve our understanding of biblical texts; 2) to examine and analyze various rabbinic and patristic interpretations of *hebel*-concept, to show similarities or differences in their train of thought and exegetical methods, and to identify whether Church Fathers and Rabbis offer fundamentally different interpretations of *hebel* (the main theme of the Book of Qohelet) or one should modify this notion? 3) by analysis of the sources to attempt to identify evidence of potential encounters between the two traditions (Jewish and Christian) in their interpretation of the Scripture in the Late Antiquity.

Our thesis represents the study in comparative exegesis and the history of biblical interpretation. It is based on exegetical method which at the same time discovers the specific features of each commentator and embraces the essence of the relations between Judaism and Christianity through the biblical exegesis of these two religious traditions. The thesis is divided into four chapters. The first three chapters survey the historiography of the problem, characterize the main sources, and analyze the historical context in which the sources were composed. The first chapter is devoted to the historiographic survey of previous studies on Jewish-Christian biblical interpretations and exegetical encounters in late antiquity in general, and on the studies on rabbinic and patristic interpretations of Qohelet in particular. The comparative study of the rabbinic and patristic literature emerged relatively recently, in the middle of the nineteenth century. Today it still continues to be developed through the use of new approaches and methods. Comparative studies of this type in broad historical and theological context examined the influence of one tradition on another, analyzed the problem of exegetical borrowing, and studied Jewish-Christian relations. There are general monographs dedicated to the rabbinic and patristic literature and more specialized studies concentrating on individual Church Fathers and their connection to Jewish exegesis. Especially important were the publications that compared

Christian and Jewish interpretations of the biblical books or separate biblical themes. Speaking about the comparative study of the rabbinic and patristic interpretations of Qohelet, scholars usually focused on the analysis of Jerome's borrowings from Jewish sources. Modern studies of rabbinic and patristic interpretations of the Bible pay attention not only to the parallels and similarities in the sources, but also analyze differences in the interpretation of the Bible. In spite of the fact that here one speaks largely about the thinkers and exegetes who lived hundreds of years ago, comparative studies of this type have long-reaching implications which can seriously influence modern Judeo-Christian relations and dialogue.

In the second chapter I paid attention to rabbinic interpretations of Qohelet, especially to the Midrash Qohelet Rabbahm and to commentaries on Qohelet of Church Fathers whose works I am using in my study. I have arrived to the conclusion that the rabbinic tradition questioned not so much the place of Qohelet in the biblical canon as the problem of its inspired origin. On the whole, the rabbis recognized Qohelet as a sacred scripture – largely because of the fact the king Solomon was considered to be its putative author. In spite of the contradictory nature of the book, Qohelet was not rejected by the Rabbis. Its contradictory nature notwithstanding, opening and closing thoughts of the book were considered to contain appropriate religious teaching. The early Rabbis did not write extensive commentaries (*midrashim*) on Qohelet and showed little interest in the wisdom of biblical sages. Aggadic Midrash Qohelet Rabbah is the only complete exegetical rabbinic commentary on Qohelet. The text of the Midrash that survived to our days had been formed as a result of deliberate work of its editor who had at his disposal many contemporary rabbinical sources. Qohelet Rabbah often does not condescend to explain the words of Qohelet, but rather adapts the text to contemporary rabbinic situation and views. Like other aggadic midrashim, Qohelet Rabbah includes creative interpretation for which it employs variety of genres. These genres comprise tales about the Sages and their disciples, parables (*mashalim*), legends, maxims, poetry, prayers, hyperbole, jokes and suchlike. Among other early rabbinic sources, in addition to Midrash Qohelet Rabbah, one must mention Targum Qohelet. In spite of the fact that Targum is normally considered a literal Aramaic translation, this Targum is much more than a simple rendition. It contains normative rabbinic interpretations of the Book of Qohelet, paraphrases, numerous addenda and corrigenda. Both Midrash Qohelet Rabbah and Targum Qohelet were most probable redacted about the same time and used similar sources. It is also interesting that while interpreting Qohelet's message, the Midrash and Targum frequently do not agree with the meaning of the original text. Feeling that Qohelet's pessimism often contradicts to the teaching of the Torah, the Midrash and Targum often offer the reading which

in its turn disagrees with Qohelet's text. As a consequence, here we can observe how the commentators rewrite the original text in the process of its exegetical interpretation.

All the abovementioned Church Fathers shared a common tendency to identify Qohelet with Christ and to interpret Ecclesiastes in the light of Christian theology. The commentaries on Qohelet of Church Fathers, which were used in this study, represent various exegetical genres of patristic literature. Didymus' commentary on Ecclesiastes was designated as school lectures. The commentary represents original evidence of the catechetical school activity in the fourth-century Christian Alexandria. In his lectures Didymus generally devotes individual comments to two main interpretative issues: the clarification of difficulties that the reader might encounter and the disclosure of the internal meaning of the text. According to Didymus' opinion, the aim of the Book of Qohelet is to direct men to the right way to comprehend "heavens."

The eights homilies on Ecclesiastes of Gregory of Nyssa were directed to his ecclesial congregation. Gregory was not really interested in writing classical commentary. He was addressing a congregation in order to acquaint them with the main aim of the book of Qohelet – to distract human soul from earthly things and to lead it to God. In his exegesis Gregory combined two methods: principles of Christian doctrine (theology, Christology, ecclesiology) and principles of human virtue (moral and spiritual benefit).

Jerome's commentary on Ecclesiastes was destined to be a highly important work in the history of biblical exegesis. It was the first Latin commentary based on the original Hebrew text. Because of the fact that Jerome was guided by the accepted division of Qohelet's text, his commentary methodically interprets Ecclesiastes verse by verse. According to Jerome, one must first understand the text literally – and only afterwards move to its spiritual interpretation. Like earlier exegetes, Jerome also asserted that Ecclesiastes taught to despise worldly life.

The third chapter of the thesis is devoted the comparative analysis of the interpretations of *hebel*-concept in the selected sources. Rabbinic and patristic interpretations of the Qohelet's text were analyzed in accordance with the themes and events described by Qohelet as *hebel*. These themes read as follows: human activity and efforts; wealth; pleasure; human speech; wisdom; human life; death and the thematic expression – "all is *hebel* (1:2;12:8)." Hereby I would like to summarize my main conclusions regarding the interpretations of each of these themes. On the basis of my results I shall try to answer the main questions of the thesis.

Human activity and efforts

While reading the text of the Midrash Qohelet Rabbah, one may notice that the Midrash is usually inclined to offer interpretation which is opposite to Qohelet's original text. Furthermore, the Midrash often simply rewrites the biblical text. The Midrash frequently does not agree with Qohelet. When speaking about "human activity and efforts," Qohelet suggests that not all the human activities and works are *hebel*. To give an example, good deeds and repentance are not depraved by vanity and futility. Moreover, the sense of human labours is toiling for other, and only the honest labours bear the fruits for the man. The Midrash expresses the idea that if the righteous does not endeavour to store up pious acts and good deeds before God, he thus leads the creation to futility. Therefore, perfection of creation is directly connected with human behaviour.

Didymus prefers to interpret the theme of futility of human labours by literal and allegorical reading. Thus, the aspiration after the things of flesh cases the futility of human works and efforts. However, in accordance with spiritual meaning, labours mentioned by Qohelet are striving for the knowledge and virtue.

Gregory of Nyssa suggests understanding the futility of human efforts in the context of theological teaching of the free will. Thus, in his opinion, evil and accordingly futility of human works result from the abuse of God's gift of freedom. Like Didymus, Gregory also suggests that in his contemplations about the futile things and labours Qohelet examined them by wisdom and knowledge and was motivated in his experience by the high aim.

Jerome also is inclined to affirm that the biblical text does not speak about earthly human efforts and wealth because wisdom could not store up it. On the contrary, in Jerome's opinion Qohelet refers to a wise man who labours both by days and by nights studying the Holy Scriptures and writing the books in order to preserve the remembrance of him for prosperity. Unfortunately, sometimes labours of such a wise man fall into hands of unwise who defame those efforts.

While analyzing these fragments of rabbinic and patristic commentaries, one can come to the conclusion about the way the Rabbis and Fathers have changed Qohelet's text in the process of reinterpretation. The Rabbis somewhat softened Qohelet's pessimism and negated the futility of all human labours on earth. For the rabbinic world-view and ethics human life and, accordingly, labours and efforts have large significance and represent a part of the Creation. Therefore, human good deeds that are done in accordance with God's commandments and teaching of the Torah by no means are vain. When discussing the theme of human labours, the

Midrash introduces ethical question and argues that sinful and vain human deeds not only destroy the life, but also negatively influence all creation. Thus rewriting the text, Qohelet Rabbah gives to understand that Qohelet means here only evil and vain human labours that are contradictory to biblical faith and ethics. Most probably the motivation of the Rabbis was the development of the theme of the synergy of human labours and creation.

The Fathers are more ascetic in comparison to the Rabbis. Therefore they recognize futile aspect of human earthly labours. However, the aim of patristic interpretation, most probably, was the spiritualization of Qohelet's text. The Fathers saw in Ecclesiastes the wise preacher and the prototype of Christ. As a result, in their opinion, Qohelet does not speak simply about earthly things, but points out the spiritual side of Qohelet's experience. Thus, according to patristic reinterpretation Qohelet's motivation of the process of examination of worldly human activity was achievement of true knowledge and wisdom. Only recognizing futility of earthly efforts a wise man can live according to the virtue and divine wisdom. Thus one can conclude that the aim of rabbinic reinterpretation was to add to Qohelet's experience the ethical aspect of human activity in this world. The Fathers, on the contrary, struggled against Qohelet's pessimism by spiritualization of the text.

Rabbinic and patristic interpretations of Qohelet are very different in their exegetical and theological approaches. However, both Rabbis and Fathers affirm that those human labours that are based on good intention, virtue, knowledge, and wisdom are not vain. Thus, we can conclude that both traditions tried to reinterpret Qohelet's experience and attempted to prove that not all human labours are *hebel.*

Wealth

When speaking about the fragments where wealth is identified as *hebel*, the Midrash follows allegorical and symbolic interpretation of the text and thus changes Qohelet's conclusion. The Midrash Qohelet Rabbah suggests that true wealth is wisdom given by God (2:26). Eating and drinking (2:24) in the book of Qohelet signify the Torah and good deeds. The Midrash also associates a rich man with a righteous rabbi. Whoever has laboured in the Torah in this world has the great wealth in the World to Come. Wise is not allowed to sleep in the Hereafter, but is taken in to the Academy of Shem and Eber, and of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses and Aaron.

Ddiymus usually offers literal and allegorical readings of Qohelet. According to his literal interpretation, a rich man shall not be satisfied with his wealth because his desire increases

with his money. By resorting to allegorical interpretation of the text, Didymus associates the wealth and silver with the Word of the Lord. Didymus also asserts that the vanity of the wealth is based on right use of it. A man can use the riches and wealth both for good and evil purposes. Therefore, the wealth is not good or bad, but its use can be vain or right.

Gregory in his sermon also argues that gathering of worldly wealth drags down the soul of the sinner – and therefore this wealth is futile. However, in his opinion, Qohelet could speak about spiritual wealth. Thus, similarly to Qohelet Rabbah, Gregory tries to see the symbol of spiritual food in eating and drinking. The wise lives by spiritual food that is wisdom, knowledge, and joy given by God.

Similarly to Didymus, Jerome also suggests that wealth in itself is good; it is a gift of God that pious man can use profit of his labours. However, later Jerome prefers allegorical meaning and argues that wealth and food mentioned in Qohelet are flesh and blood of the Lamb of God.

Whilst comparing rabbinic and patristic interpretations, we can notice that these sources have a common tendency to see in Qohelet's wealth the symbol of spiritual wealth. This similarity notwithstanding, both Rabbis and Fathers understand spiritual wealth in the context of their own religious traditions. In Fathers' opinion Qohelet's wealth means the Word of God, wisdom and flesh and blood of Christ our Savior. For the Rabbis this wealth it is the Torah and wisdom. It is also important to point out general trend by Jewish and Christian exegetes to spiritualize Qohelet's text. For rabbinic Judaism true wealth is the fruit of the study of the Torah. Therefore worldly wealth is vain in comparison with spiritual wealth of Torah that a wise man receives for his labours. While spiritualizing Qohelet's text Church Father in their turn introduced the terms and values of Christian faith that can represent spiritual wealth. As it was said above according to Fathers' opinion the aim of the Book of Qohelet is to turn human soul away from earthly values and lead it to the heavens. So no wonder that patristic commentaries decided to speak about spiritual wealth. Thus both Rabbis and Fathers in the process of reinterpretation have changed the meaning of Qohelet's text so that it may be useful and comprehended in their own religious tradition.

Pleasure

While speaking about the futility of pleasure, Midrash Qohelet Rabbah again does not agree with the direct meaning of Qohelet's words and understands his text as a reference to the pleasure of the study of the Torah. Thus, the study of the Torah in this world is vain in

comparison with its study in the World to Come because during his earthly life man learns the Torah and forgets it. Similarly to the interpretation of previous theme Qohelet Rabbah again resorts to the spiritualization of the text. If the study of the Torah can bring the spiritual wealth, a wise man devoting his life to the Torah can also receive the pleasure. However, in this case while spiritualizing the text the Midrash does not reject Qohelet's pessimism, but transfers it to allegorical reading. Thus, Qohelet Rabbah uses Qohelet's words in order to develop theological teaching of the World in the Heavens where also the study of the Torah shall be perfect in comparison with Its study in this sinful earthly reality.

The Church Fathers pay more attention to the discussion of vanity of earthly pleasure. Gregory suggests that the pleasure and mirth can negatively influence the soul. However, having taken into consideration earlier interpretations, Gregory affirms that the experience of having pleasure can at the same time help reach the knowledge of true Good. Jerome specifies that both worldly and spiritual pleasure can be a cause of vanity and degradation because a man can get a false idea of his own importance. Jerome also argues that spiritual pleasure is vanity because one can not completely enjoy it. It is only in heaven, when being revealed to a man, the pleasure will become truth. The Church Fathers in contrast to the Rabbis hold ascetic reading of the book of Qohelet. Therefore, earthly pleasure is harmful for life of Christian man. According to Gregory the pleasure has only one value in the process of the perfection of human soul because by realizing its vanity a man makes a step towards the heavens.

One can notice that Jerome's conclusion is highly similar to the midrashic interpretation of Qohelet. Both exegetical schools are of the opinion that their religious truth is negatively influenced by vanity in this world, but in the World to Come the pleasure of the study of the Holy Scripture will get rid of futile nature.

Human Speech

While commenting Qohelet's text by aggadic stories, Midrash Qohelet Rabbah does not discuss the problem of the futility of human speech. One can rather observe that the Midrash accuses some works of increasing vanity. Jerome is the only exegete from the three Church Fathers whose works we analyzed in this study who commented Qohelet's blame of human speech. Thus, according to Jerome's interpretation, a twaddle leads to the sin and therefore to the negation of God. Therefore, silence and fear of God are better for a pious man. In his

interpretation Jerome explicitly refers to the Jewish interpretation. While comparing Jerome's commentary with Midrash Qohelet Rabbah and Targum one can notice a common idea that belief in dreams is an evil and vain deed.

Wisdom

While discussing the wisdom the rabbinic interpretation does not argue that wisdom is futile. A man certainly can not comprehend all God's works and all mysteries of the nature by his wisdom. Nevertheless, it does not mean that this inability is futile. In order to deny the view that wisdom is vain, Midrash Qohelet Rabbah and Targum frequently associate wisdom with the study of the Torah. A man learns the Torah, but forgets it because of his imperfect memory. However, it is for man's good that he learns the Torah and forgets it; if a man studied the Torah and never forgot it, he would occupy himself with learning it for two or three years, resume his ordinary work and never pay further attention to it. But since a man studies the Torah and forgets it, he will not entirely abandon its study. Thus, using this logic Rabbis rewrite Qohelet's text and argue that the wisdom, like the words of the Torah, is light for a man; a wise will avoid vanity, twaddle, and heresy.

Didymus' commentary does not touch upon the theme of futility of wisdom. While speaking about wisdom Didymus emphasizes that wisdom is connected with virtues because a wise man follows instructions of God.

Gregory also does not agree that wisdom has some futile aspects in spite of its limitedness and inevitable death of wise man. Man himself can turn his wisdom in vain by speaking futile and foolish words. Moreover, Gregory affirms that human wisdom must follow true divine wisdom which he identifies with Christ.

Jerome in his interpretation explains the limitedness of the wisdom. The Church Father juxtaposes imperfect contemplation of wisdom in this life to the complete knowledge of wisdom in the Kingdom of the Lord. According to Jerome human wisdom, its imperfection notwithstanding, is not vain because it excels folly.

The Rabbis and Fathers certainly understood Qohelet's wisdom in the context of their different religious teachings. Rabbis identify wisdom with the Torah, while Church Fathers on the contrary argue that Wisdom is Christ and a head of wise man is Christ. However, in spite of these differences of interpretations, one can see that both Rabbis and Fathers in general do not agree with Qohelet that human wisdom is to some extent connected with vanity. They think that human wisdom is limited in this worldly reality, but not futile. Therefore, in the process of

reinterpretation of Qohelet, Jewish and Christian exegetes tried to struggle against Qohelet's pessimism by identifying the wisdom with spiritual values of their faith and tradition. If wisdom is represented as the Torah or Christ it can not have anything common with futile reality. Thus, rabbinic and patristic sources again have changed Qohelet's reflections by using spiritualization of the text.

Human life

When speaking about vain aspect of human life Qohelet Rabbah does not agree with Qohelet's generalization. To give an example, the Midrash attributes Qohelet's comparison of men with animals only to wicked people who are similar to beasts and who will not enter the World to Come. Contradicting Qohelet the Midrash associates Israel with beast, sheep of God and at the same time denies disparagement of humanity expressed by Qohelet. Qohelet Rabbah certainly considers that human life to some extent is vain and shadowy. Therefore, the best way for man to spend his few days is to occupy himself with words of the Torah which are all of life. As evidence the Midrash compares the reference to the wife in Qoh. 9:9 with the Torah as the best partner in wise man's life.

Didymus' understanding of human life and its futility is dualistic. His commentary correlates the vanity only with material aspect of human life. Human fleshly life is changeable and inconstant. Didymus frequently specifies that earthly material life is shadowy and vain only in comparison with excellent heavenly life. He also opposes this life to the new life in Christ and old fleshly man to the new man who overcomes futility by means of virtue and contemplation of the truth.

Jerome also associate vanity mentioned by Qohelet with this material life. The soul of man, on the contrary, is connected to heaven and therefore has nothing in common with futile and transience nature. Similarly to Didymus, Jerome sees in wife (Qoh 9:9) allusion to the wisdom. One who spends his life with wisdom will avoid the futility of life.

In these fragments one can again notice reinterpretation of the text by the commentators. This reinterpretation was done in order to make the book suitable to both religious traditions. According to rabbinic Judaism, human life is God's gift. As a consequence, Qohelet's conclusion is completely opposite to Jewish faith. It is very likely that the Rabbis, who felt this contradiction, decided to change the text and introduce clarity into Qohelet's generalization. At the same time they wanted to save the Book of Qohelet from accusation of being heretical. The Midrash explains the vain aspect of the life on the basis of ethical question; thus the life becomes

vain because of human sin and wickedness. Like in previous interpretations, Qohelet Rabbah "saves" the text by the Torah. In this case the life in accordance with the Torah's commandments again wins over futility. The Church Fathers, who followed ascetic and dualistic view on earthly life, rewrote the text by the use of spiritualization. As a consequence, the patristic sources assert that Qohelet indeed opposes human life on the earth to the spiritual life in Christ and future life on the heavens.

Speaking about the differences and similarities in rabbinic and patristic interpretations, one can notice that Qohelet Rabbah, in contrast to Church Fathers, does not depreciate earthly human life. According to rabbis a man himself makes his life vain by wicked and sinful behavior and disobedience of God's commandments. However, in spite of obvious differences between commentaries one can try to suppose that there is some aspect of similarity in a choice of way of struggle against the futility of life. Thus Rabbis identify the wife (9:9) with the Torah while Church Fathers identify it with wisdom. One can conclude that according to the midrashic interpretation the Torah was a source of knowledge and wisdom. Therefore, it is "the best partner" for a wise man. Thus, common rabbinic and patristic conclusion that the Torah and wisdom help a man to overcome the futility of his existence can be evidence of similarities of exegetical thought of both religious traditions. Both Rabbis and Fathers "save" Qohelet's text from its pessimistic mood by offering ethical and spiritual instructions in the struggle with vanity.

Death

Rabbinic interpretation does not touch the theme of the vanity of death. On the contrary, Rabbis understand the text symbolically. The Midrash decides to completely change the meaning of Qohelet's words. For Rabbis the Torah was a centre of religious life; thus, no wonder that they tried to base every interpretation on the concept of the law. The Torah and Divine Shekinah are understood by the Rabbis as the sun and sweet light for the righteous and wise man. In this context the Rabbis interpret *hebel* as the study of the Torah in this world. In this earthly reality the study of the Torah is not perfect in comparison with the learning of the Torah in the World of Messiah. The reinterpretation of the text in this case is completely developed in the context of religious values.

Didymus attributes *hebel* to visible creation and worldly life which is not eternal, but transient. Similarly to Didymus, Jerome also attributes *hebel* not to death, but rather to earthly

human life. The Church Fathers also prefer to interpret Qohelet's text allegorically and compare the sweet light and the sun with God Father and Christ.

Rabbinic and patristic sources avoid speaking about the death. They rather rewrite the text and offer additional meaning based on spiritualization of Qohelet's words. In the case of this theme both Rabbis and Church Fathers again understand Qohelet's text according to their religious tradition and teaching. However, this theological confrontation notwithstanding, one can attempt to deduce similarity in their exegetical approaches. Both rabbinic and patristic sources are rather engaged to explain what is the sun and light of this Qohelet's verse in the context of Jewish and Christian faith. Rabbis understand the sun as the Torah while Church Fathers identify the divine light with God (Trinity). The study of the Torah is great enjoyment of the life of the sages; Jerome understands the joy as knowledge of the Holy Scripture. Furthermore, Jerome emphasizes the necessary to unite the Torah and Gospel because both Testaments have God's grace. Therefore rabbinic and patristic exegetes have common tendency to oppose the holiness of their religious tradition to the futility of earthly reality and to resque Qohelet's text from pessimistic mood.

All is hebel

When interpreting this thematic phrase Rabbis suggest that Qohelet's words "all is *hebel*" do not refer to creation and universe. The Midrash understands *hebel* as a symbol of some aspects of human life only. At the same time Qohelet Rabbah offers the way of struggle with the vanity of life and supposes that the Torah could save a man. Each person who follows the example of King David in the study of the Torah can avoid disintegration of old age, spiritual infirmity and futile character of his existence. Targum Qohelet also does not understand *hebel* in abstract concepts, but prefers to associate it only with the labours of Solomon and David and the history of Israel in this world.

Church Fathers juxtapose *hebel* with God's perfection and eternity, and with Christ's revelation and the message of Gospel. By using New Testament Christian commentators suggest that vanity and imperfection of human life is surmounted in the perfection of Christ, observance of Gospel teaching and contemplation of Divine Wisdom.

One can suppose that similarity between interpretations is found in a way by which it is possible to win over vanity. The Midrash sees this way in the study of the Torah and in the life according to the Torah commandments. Church Fathers suggest that salvation from futility and vanity is possible only in the perfect Christ and in the light of His Gospel. Of course, these two

different exegetical schools offer different ways to win over vanity. However, there is common tendency to see salvation from vanity in the religious tradition. Another similarity is clearly manifested in the common conclusion that verse 1:2 of Qohelet ("all is *hebel*") does not refer to futility of whole being. The Midrash understands *hebel* as a symbol of some aspects of human life only. Church Fathers likewise argue that material word is created by God and therefore it is not vain. Only in comparison to God is material world futile because of its transience. In fact the vain human activity imparts futile aspect to the existence and world. Jewish and Christian exegetes realize that if Qohelet's "all is *hebel*" is a reference to the whole Creation, the book can not be included in the biblical canon because of its heretical mood. Therefore, by offering the abovementioned reinterpretation of this verse, the rabbinic and patristic sources avoid Qohelet's generalization and resque the book from its pessimism, contradictions and freethinking.

The comparison of the rabbinic and patristic interpretations of *hebel*-concept in the Book of Qohelet carried out in this thesis reveals more differences than similarities between the sources. The rabbinic and patristic interpretations differ in genre, and theological and ideological ideas. Christian interpretations are represented in various genres: homilies, school lectures, and classic commentary-compilation. Qohelet Rabbah, on the contrary, does not employ such a variety of genres. Although it uses symbolic interpretation, Qohelet Rabbah does not base it on the rhetoric methods of classic Roman-Greek world which were so widespread in patristic exegesis. At the same time, the Midrash does not try to include Greek philosophical ideas in its interpretation – something that has been done by Church Fathers. The apparent differences between the rabbinic and patristic interpretation of *hebel* should be explained first of all by the fact that each tradition based its exegetical methodology on its religious and ideological background. As was demonstrated above in the fragments which were analyzed in this dissertation, the Rabbis and Fathers contrast futility of human life and activity to the values of their religious tradition. Qohelet Rabbah often develops its reinterpretation on the basis of the concept of the Torah. Church Fathers juxtapose futility to perfect life in Christ and try to rewrite Qohelet's text in the light of Gospel's teaching. This conclusion, however, does not make my comparison less interesting. In spite of prevalent differences in the understanding of the book of Qohelet in general and *hebel*-concept in particular, my analysis has shown the wide spectrum of possible interpretation of the Book of Qohelet and demonstrated several common tendencies in the approach of understanding of Qohelet and *hebel*.

Thus, having compared the rabbinic and patristic interpretations of the abovementioned *hebel*-themes in Qohelet, we can come to the conclusion about common exegetical approaches between these two exegetical schools. Both Rabbis and Fathers often do not agree with Qohelet's *hebel*-conclusion and sometimes reinterpret or rewrite the biblical text in their interpretations of the fragments which were analyzed by us in this dissertation. To give an example, commentators reject Qohelet's opinion that all human labours, wisdom, and creation are *hebel.* According to the Rabbis a man himself makes his life vain by wicked and sinful behaviour. The Fathers normally explain that human life and earthly reality is vain because of the incorrect use of free will given by God. Both Rabbis and Fathers see in Qohelet's wealth and pleasure the symbol of spiritual wealth. This spiritual pleasure is of course represented in both religious traditions in a different manner. For Rabbis, it is pleasure of the study of the Torah; for Fathers – the light of the Gospel. Obviously, in this process of reinterpretation, rabbinic and patristic commentaries have changed the meaning of the interpreted verses in order to prevail over Qohelet's pessimism and contradictions and to rescue the book for their religious traditions. In Rabbis' and Fathers' opinion values such as creation, human labours, and wisdom are not vain. Therefore, the aim of the exegetes is to save them from utter futility, meaningless, and absurdity. Another method of reinterpretation and salvation of Qohelet's text is its spiritualization. It seems very probable that both Rabbis and Fathers, who saw in Solomon the wisest man in the world, considered that by wealth and pleasure he could mean only events and things of high spiritual values. Therefore, the aim of both rabbinic and patristic commentaries was to reveal this hidden spiritual meaning of the text.

As evident from the fragments analyzed above, the rabbinic and patristic exegetes have a common tendency to juxtapose the holiness of their religious tradition to the futility of earthly reality. The way to struggle against the futility is to some extent also rather similar. In commentators' opinion their religion and faith (the Torah and wisdom for Rabbis; the Gospel, life in Christ and virtue for Fathers) help a man to overcome the futility of his existence.

Rabbinic and patristic endevour to rewrite Qohelet's text, to make it acceptable for their respective religious teaching and tradition, definitely has its reasons. One of them is probably based on rabbinic and patristic understanding of the Holy Scripture. There is no doubt that both Rabbis and Fathers alike considered the Holy Scriptures inspired and invariable. Nevertheless, interpretations of Qohelet have demonstrated that the ancient biblical text became alive and topical for religious contexts of its commentators. Qohelet's text ceased to be unchangeable "holy of the holies" – and became loqacious interlocuter with whom one could speak and even

argue. Therefore, no wonder that under the influence of the free interpretative attitude to the biblical text mentioned above, Rabbis and Fathers resorted to the rewriting of Qohelet. Such attitude, for example, is not found in ortodox Protestantism or Karaism. By using aggadic stories and method of midrash rabbinic interpretation included in its commentary topical questions of the teaching of rabbinic Judaism. This factor at the same time made the book of Qohelet acceptable and understandable for their contemporaries. On the other hand, Church Fathers, who resorted to Christian exegetical methods of the Bible (e.g. to literal, allegoric and spiritual interpretation), added to the book of Qohelet numerous aspects of Christian teahing.

Understanding of the Holy Scripture as a whole unity was another important reason for rewriting Qohelet. Therefore, the Rabbis tried to see in Qohelet the unity with the Torah and interpreted it in the light of the Torah's teaching. Thus, in case they found that Qohelet contradicted to the main principles of the Torah, the Rabbis tried to smooth over these contradictions. Christian teaching of the unity of the Old and New Testaments induced Church Fathers to identify Ecclesiastes with Christ and to interpret the book in the context of Gospel. Therefore, understanding of *hebel*-concept, Qohelet, and its rewriting fully depended on the understanding of the Bible in the light of the religious tradition which has been mentioned above.

Therefore, common rabbinic and patristic conclusions based on the interpretation of Qohelet can be evidence of similarities of exegetical thought of both religious traditions. In my opinion, these similarities may testify also to some potential exegetical encounters between these rabbinic and patristic exegetical schools. On the other hand, even if this alleged encounter has never taken place, there is no wonder that both traditions came to similar conclusions with regard to the concept of *hebel*. Both rabbis and fathers shared common biblical text and tradition. Therefore, in some cases their interpretations might have been similar.

To conclude, I would like to say that the comparative analysis of the interpretation of *hebel*-concept carried out in this thesis has demonstrated the common understanding and similarity in exegetical approaches to the book of Qohelet in rabbinic and patristic exegesis in Late Antiquity. Therefore, the thesis has again emphasized the idea that the comparative study of early biblical exegesis in Jewish and Christian traditions plays an important role in understanding the Bible in general and the Book of Qohelet in particular. In spite of obviously different exegetical methods and interests of both traditions, the understanding of *hebel* and events denoted by it is to some extent similar. In the fragments of Jewish and Christian sources, which were analyzed in this work, one can sometimes see same or opposite conclusions, same literary form, polemics between exegetes, and use of the well-known theme which is controversial both for Jews and Christians. Thus, having

identified these interpretative features, we can attempt to assume the existence of potential encounters between Jewish and Christian exegetical tradition. In the case of Jerome's commentary these contacts are rather obvious because Jerome often explicitly refers to his Jewish teacher. Didymus and Gregory, most probably, could get to know Jewish interpretations through other sources, for example, via Origen's commentaries. However, reconstruction of these exegetical contacts requires additional research which we intend to do as our postdoctoral research project.

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